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**The Subject of Conrad:**  
**A Lacanian Reading of Subjectivity in Joseph Conrad's Fiction**  
**Brandon Jenvey**

**PhD – The University of Edinburgh – 2016**

**In loving memory of Susan Jenvey, my mother**

## **Declaration**

I, Brandon Jenvey, declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research. The work in this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed,

Brandon Jenvey

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## Abstract

This thesis examines how the fiction of Joseph Conrad anticipates and enacts the elaborate model of subjectivity that is later formalised in the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan. While modernist criticism has often utilised the work of post-structuralism in reading key texts of modernism, the complexity and profundity of the conceptual relationship between Conrad and Lacan has not yet been explored in depth.

Conrad's work captures the impact and influence of emerging transnational capital upon forms of the subject in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Further, his fiction is also sensitive to how nascent global capital structures forms of space that the subject is embedded within in their daily experience. I argue that it is the intricate and finely woven theories of Lacan that are necessary in identifying this area of the novelist's work, as Lacan's model contends with both the individual psychic structure of the subject, and, crucially, how the individual is located and constituted within the broader matrix of social reality.

Using four of Conrad's novels from his early period to the end of his major phase, the thesis traces the evolution of the various fundamental modalities of Lacan's subject across Conrad's fiction. I examine how *Almayer's Folly* offers the key tenets of Lacan's primary model of the subject of desire, while *Lord Jim* presents the transition of the subject of desire into Lacan's later mode of the subject of drive. Subsequently, *The Secret Agent* is shown to critique the role of rationalism in the structuring of the subject's consciousness, while, finally, I read *Under Western Eyes* as a *tour de force* of Lacan's four discourses. The deep and fundamental relationship between the two figures' work attests to their acuity in observing the development of the subject in the twentieth century, while the method of theoretical analysis also, on a wider disciplinary level, suggests and helps to confirm the continued validity of the mode of deep reading in literary interpretation.

## Introduction: Conrad, Lacan and Subjectivity

Writing in a letter to Edward Garnett in 1896, a year after the publication of *Almayer's Folly*, Conrad proposes to his friend and critic that a significant 'truth' must be acknowledged – that it must be 'grasped that one's own personality is only a ridiculous and aimless masquerade of something hopelessly unknown' (qtd. in Najder, *Conrad Life* 222). Such a contention suggests—even at such an early stage in his career as a novelist—an interest in the nature of the human subject. Further, Conrad appears to question and reject the idea that an individual can entertain a full self-awareness, or that one's consciousness can be wholly and transparently comprehended. Over the following decades, this nascent conception becomes one that not only consistently recurs within but comes to markedly define aspects of his creative enterprise. Conrad's prose is seen to offer a 'complex construction of subjectivity' (Kaplan, Mallios and White, 'Introduction' xxi) that presents the larger field of 'subjectivity itself' (Orr and Billy 143) as an area of artistic inquiry to be probed and considered. It is even tempting to discern within his brief statement to Garnett echoes of a particular structure of subjectivity – the psychoanalytic subject, one split between the conscious ego or 'personality' and the 'hopelessly unknown' dimension of the unconscious.

Indeed, the multi-faceted shapes and structures of the subject that become discernible within Conrad's writing—ones which refuse the 'enshrining of consciousness as a repository of meaning and value' (Levenson 22)—bear a remarkable resemblance to those belonging to one of the most provocative thinkers of the twentieth century. This figure is the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan – whose work has been noted as much for its conceptual 'force and originality' (Ragland-Sullivan, 'Introduction' xi) regarding his theory of the subject, as for its 'elusive' and, at times, 'infuriating' (Homer 8) prose style. Accordingly, it is the central aim of this thesis to identify and trace the presence of various modes of Lacanian subjectivity across Joseph Conrad's fiction, specifically, within the novels *Almayer's Folly*, *Lord*



*Jim*, *The Secret Agent* and, finally, *Under Western Eyes*.

The thesis will seek to demonstrate that Conrad's work anticipates the elaborate model of subjectivity that Lacan will later develop and formalise through his own psychoanalytic theory and praxis. Certainly, for Lacan, literature offers the potential to exemplify psychoanalytic concepts; as he clearly asserts, the 'resonances [...] of literature' are 'necessary to an understanding of the text of [the subject's] experience' (*Écrits* 362) – a perspective that Lacan most visibly enacts in his seminar on James Joyce. In itself, this approach builds upon that of Freud's, which Lacan keenly acknowledges. He explicitly states that Freud often draws his 'inspiration, ways of thinking, and arsenal of techniques' (362) from within works of literature. However, it is necessary to distinguish that Freudian psychoanalysis is 'always trying to go through language' (Mellard 7) into the 'primacy of events' (6) in its model of the subject, whereas, what makes Lacan particularly appropriate for literary interpretation is his insistence instead on the 'primacy of language' itself, and, more specifically, the 'primacy of the language of the subject' (6).

As such, this interpretation of Conrad's writing is unashamedly theoretical in both its intention and its method. Yet the employment of a theoretical approach is not undertaken in ignorance of its status within the broader confines of contemporary literary scholarship. Before the substantive content of this interpretation is developed, it is necessary to consider the critical context in which this thesis finds itself, both in terms of literary research generally, and, more specifically, within the present state of Conrad studies.

Literary research on Conrad is an exemplary case of the tension between two poles of critical approach – theory and historicism. Clearly, it is important to acknowledge at this early stage that theory is certainly not a 'single, self-identical object' (Elliot and Attridge, 'Introduction' 2), and is instead a 'rich heterogeneity' (2) of complex ideas representing multiple discourses. However, these varied discourses do exhibit certain unities of approach—such as a focus upon language and interpretation—that enables one to talk about

theory as a generally related and coherent body of thought. From these many approaches, it is the insight Lacan's theoretical project offers for Conrad's fiction that stands out and which this thesis aims to establish. As Fredric Jameson observes, 'of all the writing called theoretical, Lacan's is the richest' ("Dialectic" 355-56).

Presently, of course, most readings of the author are enacted according to the model of historicism, the 'critical movement insisting on the prime importance of historical context to the interpretation of texts' (Hamilton, 'Introduction' 2). This historicist contextual approach repeatedly emphasises that both texts and 'concepts have a history that renders them contingent [so that they] cannot be understood adequately without elaborating the histories through which they are produced' (Dean 28) – a logic that 'literary scholars' refer to and 'seize' upon as the 'supposed absoluteness and incontrovertibility of historical fact' (Muson and Willan 11). Nowhere is this tendency more pronounced than in studies of Conrad himself, where it is asserted that Conrad's 'remarkably varied output is best understood only when considered within the equally varied historical, cultural, and social context in which he wrote' (Peters, 'Introduction' 4). This kind of approach seeks to sustain and orientate the nature and direction of Conrad studies as it explicitly 'foster[s] and help[s] to fashion future scholarship on this remarkable author' (Simmons, 'Preface' xv) in a self-perpetuating, interpretively enclosed fashion.

While Tim Dean could at least note when writing in 2000 that 'a certain historicist logic has become pervasive in the humanities' (28)—implying that multiple interpretive possibilities were still open—this position has depressingly shifted in more recent years. At the present time, it is generally accepted within the scholarly field that 'historicism has achieved disciplinary hegemony' (Dunn and Haddox, 'Introduction' xvi) to such an extent that it has become the default literary critical position – an unacknowledged, reflex approach that determines and defines contemporary analysis. Indeed, this situation has become so pronounced that in 2011 *The Limits of Literary Historicism* was published, which illuminates

and attempts to counteract some of the most pressing restrictions that historicism enacts. Of the issues it raises, perhaps the most pertinent is historicism's suffocating reliance on context as the final arbiter of meaning, as well as the reductive model of history and time that it adheres to in its methodology – areas that will be examined in due course. Allen Dunn and Thomas F. Haddox, commenting on this aforementioned 'hegemony' in the book's introduction, observe that it is 'no longer common for historicists' to even need to 'define or defend the assumptions guiding their methodology' ('Introduction' xvi) as their approach is so ingrained within the discipline. Beyond the observations made in this particular text, it has become clear that 'the current intellectual climate [...] pivots on a fealty to the clarifying power of historical context' (Felski 574). Consequently, given the present state of English studies, the question of why undertake a theoretical reading of Joseph Conrad at all must surely be addressed, as there appears to be 'little disagreement that the era of theory's dominance has passed' (Elliot and Attridge, 'Introduction' 1). Indeed, one of the more pessimistic recent appraisals of theory's present vigour and health asserts that 'conversations regarding the status of theory [appear] akin to an ongoing wake' (1).

A theoretical Lacanian reading of Conrad may be initially seen as, at best, unconventional or, more realistically, as redundantly anachronistic<sup>1</sup> – a vestigial interpretive endeavour best consigned to the critical practices of over twenty years ago. In 1997, the foremost scholarly journal solely dedicated to historicist-orientated Conrad studies—*The Conradian*—published its single theoretically influenced volume, *Conrad and Theory*, as testament to theory's undeniable vogue at that time. Unsurprisingly, the introduction within this study revealed a noticeably tentative and wary engagement with its proposed method of inquiry – even during the heyday of theory. The volume was offered as an attempt 'designed to stage an encounter between Conrad and theory' or, more accurately, 'to see what kinds of encounters between Conrad and theory were taking place in the late nineties' (Hampson, 'Introduction' 2), as a kind of conceptual canary thrust down into the literary-critical

mineshaft. Most damningly, it was deemed an 'exploration of the relevance to Conrad studies of some of the kinds of theoretical work that is currently taking place' (2). The insistent references to 'encounter', 'dialogue' (1) and 'relevance' all reinforce the sense of the intellectual partition and marginalisation of theory's place outside of the orthodoxy of Conradian critical practice – a marginalisation that has only intensified into the present day given historicism's current hegemony.

In fact, this critical banishment is certainly one reason why a Lacanian reading of Conrad is necessary as, in one sense, this thesis functions as an attempt to help prove the validity and productiveness of a theoretical, psychoanalytic methodology. It is this existential challenge posed by historicism to a particular means of theoretical textual analysis that makes a Lacanian interpretation of heightened importance – a point that Jane Gallop argues when she states that the 'threat to disciplinary survival is surely the most important reason to resist the historicization of literary studies' (6). Of course, in no way is this thesis presented as an isolated effort to achieving this end. Rather, as Rita Felski suggests, a 'multitude of minor mutinies and small-scale revolts are [already] underway' (576). Clearly, while Felski's criticism of historicism is situated within a different project—that of post-critique—and is not one that I adhere to in this thesis, she is certainly correct to make this observation. One particularly relevant, recent example of these 'minor mutinies' is the V21 Collective, which offers some of the more visible and interesting moves to shift away from an 'ever more habitual and unreflective' historicism<sup>2</sup> ("Manifesto V21") – an effort with which this thesis shares a sense of affinity. This critical collective was started in 2015 and comprises a network of mainly US-based scholars. While primarily a group of Victorian researchers—Conrad's early work, of course, can be labelled late-Victorian—the collective offers a trenchant articulation of historicism's limitations.

## The limitations of historicism

For example, the V21's manifesto asserts that the historicist 'mode of inquiry' simply and narrowly attempts to 'exhaustively describe, preserve, and display the past' via a 'fetishization of the archival' ("Manifesto") so that the literary work becomes a mere receptacle for various contextual investigations. This bluntly empirical approach, whereby historical and factual references are laboriously soldered onto the text, reflects an 'aspiration to definitively map the DNA of [a] period' and to 'reconstruct the past *wie es eigentlich gewesen* [how it really was]' ("Manifesto"). It is a process that restrictively channels literary research into becoming an 'endless accumulation of mere information' ("Manifesto"); exemplifying the deficiency Christopher Lane identifies in historicism when he refers to 'the poverty of context' ("Poverty" 466). The text is bluntly reduced to a factual platform for historically verifiable information, so that 'the task of the critic is to lock that context into place, by locating the historicity in the text and the text in history' (Dimock 1061). The V21's movement away from a strictly materialist approach might, in fact, draw some momentum from such critical movements as New Modernist Studies, and its proponents, Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz. Their 2008 PMLA article, "The New Modernist Studies", helps question the 'rigid temporal delimitations' (737) that can be located in a historicist approach, while its engagement with the idea of 'spatial [...] expansion' (738)—articulated in the concept of a 'transnational' modernism—seeks to incorporate texts that, conventionally, have been seen as outside of the Eurocentric and North American geographical boundaries of modernist studies. Most important, however, is the openness towards varying fields of critical inquiry, including 'questions pertaining to literary form, [...] psychoanalysis' and other methodologies, which 'continue to propel important scholarly endeavors' (728) in literary critical research.

While critics of New Modernist Studies, such as Max Brzezinski, might contend that it

has become little more than a 'brand' —a 'marketable intellectual commodity' (109)—that is, I would argue, simply another form of critical reductionism similar to that of historicism. It is surely possible to see in Dao's and Walkowitz's push towards an 'expansion' (Dao and Walkowitz 737) of critical modes an attempt to develop the very 'ground-breaking theory' (Brzezinski 119) that Brzezinski argues that it forecloses. Indeed, the potential of 'expansion' is surely what Carolyn Lesjak is also demanding in her plea for 'more interpretation [and] more dialectical complexity' (251) in literary criticism that is examined later in this introduction.

Returning to the V21's critique of historicism, 2015's *Conrad's "The Duel": Sources/Text* exhibits this aforementioned approach of a reductive contextualisation, where the author's short story is exhaustively related to every possible source available to Conrad during his time of composition. While it 'offers a comprehensive and fascinating genealogy of all the known versions of the story' (Pauly, review of *Conrad's "The Duel": Sources/Texts*), it does so regardless of whether or not Conrad actually appears to use any of the versions or sources that were available to him as he was writing.

Further emblematic of these processes, *A Historical Guide to Joseph Conrad* irremovably 'situates Conrad within [...] aspects of his historical context by considering their relation to his fiction' (Larabee 49). What becomes concerning is how this approach is unsurprisingly seen as the solitary means of 'illuminating [Conrad's] core artistic techniques and moral precepts' (49). In such instances, it is apparent that historical context is unreflexively deployed as a type of 'box or container in which individual texts are encased and held fast', so that 'the literary object remains trapped in the conditions that preside over the moment of its birth' with its 'meaning determined in relation to texts and objects of the same moment' (Felski 577).

For example, this reduction and encasement is clearly evident in Mike Larabee's critical contemplation of Conrad's fictional depiction of the sea. Understanding this depiction

can only 'start by placing [Conrad's] fictional voyages in the context of historical routes and cargoes' (50) and to this end Larabee assiduously reconstructs the cargoes, routes and passenger types prevalent upon Conrad's voyages and directly relates them to his fiction. These factual 'episodes and people of Conrad's nautical past' are then declared as unequivocally functioning as the 'raw material for his fiction', and research subsequently focuses upon 'reconstructing his voyages and connecting fictional characters to their real-life sources' (48). Similarly, other historicist criticism 'evaluates Conrad's fiction in light of the principles of seamanship' and condenses it back down to the author's 'work aboard sailing ships' (48).

That is not to say that this research lacks value. Of course, scholarly research should not 'abandon the social-historical dimensions of literature' as a work 'means more when considered in its cultural context' (Munson and Willan 26). What becomes highly problematic is that historicism intrinsically 'treats works of art only as cultural symptoms of their own moment [and] as moribund matter buried in the past' (Felski 575). This method dictates that an empirically determined understanding of Conrad's work is posited as the ultimate horizon of meaning – clearly eliding exploration of the broader resonance of artistic depiction within Conrad's novels as 'the meaning of a text is assumed to be the property of the historical period in which it originated' (Dimock 1060-61). It is an approach that only strengthens an 'authoritarian model of transmitting preprocessed knowledge' (Gallop 7) *qua* factual, archival information and reinforces the notion of a singular correspondence between a specific aspect of Conrad's fiction and the particular historical moment of its conception.

Historicism's 'entrenched conceptions' (Insko 105) regarding texts and time are also embedded in the model of history that historicism utilises in its methodology and which informs the majority of present research into Conrad. In *The Limits of Literary Historicism*, Jeffrey Insko observes that within the historicist school both time and history are 'divid[ed]' into 'discernible and measurable units' (118)—a coherent, rational progression—so that the

function of the critic is to simply 'fix literary texts to their contexts' (118). As Wai Chee Dimock suggests, in this model, the critic merely 'impute[s] meanings to a text by situating it among events in the same slice of time' (1061). This capacity to analyse a 'slice of time', or a specific historical moment, means that the 'interpretive frame' of historicism is a 'cross-section of a temporal axis' (1061); the very framework of history is logical, linear and fully transparent. In these cases, historicism 'brackets rather than resolves the problem of temporality' (Felski 575).

This model is keenly discernible in the greater part of contemporary scholarship on Conrad's fiction. One particular recent example which embodies this tendency is 2014's *Conrad Chronology* by Owen Knowles, in which Knowles presents the 'basic facts of [Conrad's] life unadorned, reducing it to the bare dates and events' (Simmons, review of *Conrad Chronology*). It is the very publication of such a study which represents the dominant principle of historicism and its attendant structure of history in its purest form – a meticulous, overriding deferral to dates, facts and information comprehensible through a linear model of temporality at the clear expense of any deeper interpretive potential. However, as Rita Felski observes, 'history is not a box' (575). From a theoretical critical perspective, such a model proves exceptionally 'deficient in accounting for the transtemporal movement and affective resonance of particular texts' (574). Texts actually do 'a lot of traveling: across space and especially across time. And as they travel they run into new semantic networks, new ways of imputing meaning' (Dimock 1061).

Nowhere is this 'resonance' (1061) more evident than in Conrad's fiction. Indeed, 'Conrad's implications are so extensive and plural [...] that reading his works has already become a principal strategy of attempting to discern the terms of contemporary existence' (Kaplan, Mallios and White, 'Introduction' xiii). Instead of conceptual encasement within an inflexible, rigid framework of temporal interpretation, on 'the pages of [Conrad's] books that world of a hundred years ago looks strikingly, disturbingly familiar' (Najder, *Perspective* 187),



as 'the themes of global conflict' and 'dislocation [...] so central to Conrad's work have become the titles of our headlines and the stuff of our dreams and nightmares' (Kaplan, Mallios and White, 'Introduction' xiv). The omnipresent threat of terrorism, the increasing encroachment of media into everyday life and the transnational influence of capitalism all attest to the author's prescience and continued relevance for the present day. Further, Conrad's engagement with and exploration of the effects of these factors upon the realm of subjectivity will be shown in this thesis to be both vital and relevant for contemporary scholarship, as his writing on the human subject 'transcended contemporary thinking and, in doing so, largely specified the terms in which we struggle today with this still vexatious topic' (Kaplan, Mallios and White, 'Introduction' xxi). Such critical acknowledgement of Conrad's 'resonance' for our present time suggests how the historicist mode of 'capturing a literary text only in its pastness' structurally forecloses its depth of meaning while limiting critical discussion within narrow parameters, as it 'cannot say why this text might still matter in the present' (Dimock 1061).

### **A Lacanian model of history**

It would seem appropriate at this moment to deploy an alternative conception of historical and temporal understanding in order to facilitate a Lacanian interpretation of Conrad's fiction. This alternative model is one more aligned with Conrad's own reservations about a static, rigid model of history and time. Further, it is attuned to the author's foregrounding of 'the unseen limits of knowing and the unforeseen consequences of action within historicalness' (Cooper 148) which suggests that Conrad envisages limits to what history is capable of encompassing. Such an explanation will enable a more sophisticated and sensitive interpretive engagement with his novels, and also supports the assertion that Lacanian 'psychoanalysis, through its commitment to forms and its unorthodox grasp of

perception, recasts our understanding of time and socially orchestrated sequences' (Lane, "Poverty" 455) to help liberate literary analysis from a fixed, inflexible historicism.

A rigid, inflexible model of history and time is one that Conrad distances himself from in his own writing, where he actually offers an alternative conception of history. The author identifies and rejects an inferior, '[conventional] history' that is 'based on documents, and the reading of print and handwriting—on second-hand impression' (Conrad, *Notes* 17) in what could conceivably be seen as a refutation of a grindingly empirical method of conceptualisation. In stark contrast, Conrad argues that '[f]iction is history, human history, or it is nothing', and states unequivocally that the 'novelist is a historian, the preserver, the keeper, the expounder, of human experience' (17) – fiction itself becomes a 'firmer ground' (17) upon which to pursue an understanding of the human subject and its passage through time. Such a perspective clearly does not align with a historicist model of history. It is evident that Conrad 'does not deny that history exists' but rather 'denies the boundless omniscience of the historian [and that] we must be subject to a precisely verifiable orderliness' (Cooper 148) in regards to the functioning of time.

Lacan's own writings offer some similarities to Conrad's in their scepticism towards a 'precisely verifiable orderliness' of historical structure. A precedent for a Lacanian model of history has been set by Teresa Brennan, who asserts that 'Lacan has a fledgling [theory of history] nestling in his work' (279). She suggests that this model is based on 'Lacan's theory of the ego's era' (Brennan 279), where 'his historical side is crystallized in [his] critique of ego psychology' (280). The dominant mode of our present conceptualisation of a segmented history and rationalised time—one which suggestively recalls the critical framework of historicism—is that they are both defined by their capacity to be fully measurable, transparent and linear. This acutely rational organisation is symptomatic of the structure of the subject's ego according to Lacan, and how the ego constructs and comprehends history. Brennan argues that, for Lacan, 'the ego desires to dominate and control, and that a means

to domination and control is [...] the reduction of everything different or other than itself to a scale the ego can manage, and to the grey background of sameness' (286).

This impetus to dominate and control—one that is located at the level of the ego—can be more comprehensively explained via a brief exploration of Lacan's indebtedness to Hegel. Hegel's notion of the master and slave dialectic is an integral component of Lacan's conception of historical structure, and one which he suggests both underpins and drives the movement of history. Indeed, Lacan argues that Hegel offers 'the definitive theory of the specific function of aggressiveness in human ontology [and that from] the conflict between Master and Slave, he deduce[s] the entire subjective and objective progress of our history' (*Écrits* 98). However, one must note that Lacan's 'familiarity' with Hegel's work is inarguably 'mediated by Kojève's lectures at the École des Hautes-Études in the 1930s' (Barzilai 97), as his usage of these concepts clearly bears the interpretive marks of the Russian philosopher.

In his model, Lacan utilises not only the key concept of 'Kojève's Hegelianism' which is his 'analysis of the Master-Slave dialectic', but, further, Kojève's 'application of it as the underlying motive force of world-history' (Nichols 22). As Kojève states, '[h]uman history is the history of desired desires' (6). Human beings desire to 'put oneself in the place of the object of the other's desire' (Nichols 25), in the sense that they are motivated by the 'human urge for recognition, that is, by the desire to make the other respect his worth and dignity' (25), so that, in order to achieve this recognition, they 'approach each other with hostile intent' (25). However, for this 'recognition' to work, both humans must survive; one as the victor—the master, enjoying his 'pure prestige' (25)—and the other, losing side, becomes the slave who works for the master. As such, aggression and the need for recognition form an intrinsic part of the intersubjective relationship between the two subjects of the master and the slave, and consequently also defines the social order itself and the dynamic of human history.

Certainly, while Lacan's own structure of subjectivity and history clearly integrates

aspects of Kojève's Hegelianism—most notably, that the ego is inherently inter-subjective and rivalrous with its dependence on the other, and of aggressiveness and narcissism as motive forces driving the ego—he modifies aspects of Kojève's Hegelianism regarding the movement of history. For Kojève, the slave breaking 'his chains [becomes] the ultimate end and goal of the dialectical movement of history' (Dale 93), with Kojève himself seeing the Soviet revolution as the final revolution in this process. By contrast, Lacan rather sees this conflict and struggle as 'interminable' (Clemens 73) and 'without appealing to the future (Lacan, *Écrits* 242), so that 'there is and can be no "end" to history' (Clemens 73). History is dependent upon the inherent and inevitable ego's drive for domination over the other.

This aforementioned Lacanian 'reduction' to a quantifiable, measurable 'sameness' is perhaps similarly visible in the historicist impulse to condense and diminish the resonance of a text back down to its controllable, static place within the sequence of 'discernible and measurable units' (Insko 118) that is its model of historical understanding, or what Brennan refers to as Lacan's idea of a 'controlling objectifying knowledge' (291). The result of this impulse is that 'everything different is deadened and dominated in the process of becoming totally preoccupied with the ego' (287). Any 'lively heterogenous difference' (287) regarding the text is eviscerated by this 'flattening process [that] has its origin in the psychical dynamics of the ego's era' (287).

For Brennan, these elements constitute the Lacanian perspective towards the dominant, conventional understanding of history. She suggests that Lacan believes the 'imaginary ego dominates more over historical time' which leads to a state of 'social psychosis' (291); time is flat, deadened and linear, and meaning becomes fixed and inert – once a text is cemented into a historical moment, it remains there. Lacan contrasts this temporal and semantic stasis against what can be called the 'movement of living history' (286) which can be achieved through the psychoanalytic process of the 'symbolic activity of rewriting history' (291). This idea of 'rewriting history' involves 'producing meaning [...] which

of itself means nothing fixed’—in contrast to the static structure of the ego—‘as a means for going beyond the present standpoint’ (302) of historical understanding. Slavoj Žižek details this process. He states how historical ‘meaning is not discovered’ or ‘excavated from the hidden depth of the past’, but is, instead, ‘constructed retroactively’ (Žižek, *Sublime* 58) through the symbolic order. The past can exist only ‘as it enters (into) the synchronous net of the signifier – that is, as it is symbolized in the texture of the historical memory – and that is why we are all the time “rewriting history”, retroactively giving the elements their symbolic weight by including them in new textures’ (59).

Such a procedure, that goes beyond a limited structure of the subject as merely the ego, allows a Lacanian reading of Conrad to ‘delve beneath the surface of symbolic constructions to identify the tensions, desires, anxieties, and discontents that contribute to the changes in forms of subjectivity and in social systems’ (Marshall 1214) – ones that would otherwise remain latent and unheeded in an empirical analysis. Indeed, were an interpretation to use an exclusively empirical method of analysis this approach would enforce a model of subjectivity *qua* the ego that Conrad himself seeks to explode and reconfigure through his own interrogation of the limits inherent in the subject’s conscious self. These are limitations to which a theoretical, Lacanian interpretation offers a set of necessary correctives.

Brennan’s outline of a Lacanian structure of history supports the observation that ‘[p]sychoanalytic concepts are not so much indifferent to the claims of historicity as they are grounded in an alternative understanding of it’ (Dean 51). Žižek’s concept of historicity exemplifies this contention. He argues what ‘distinguishes [historicity] is precisely the presence of an unhistorical kernel’, and that the ‘way to save historicity from the fall into historicism, into the notion of the linear succession of “historical epochs,” is to conceive these epochs as a series of ultimately failed attempts to deal with the same “unhistorical” traumatic kernel’ (*Enjoy* 94). This kernel is, of course, the Lacanian real. There will always be a

fundamental aspect of history that cannot be directly comprehended. As such, the drive and movement of 'human *history* [is defined] by its reference to this *non-historical* place, a place that cannot be symbolized, although it is retroactively produced by the symbolization itself' (Žižek, *Sublime* 150). History can only be understood through the effects rendered upon the symbolic order – a process that can be aligned with Fredric Jameson's idea that history is an 'absent cause' which is 'inaccessible to us except in textual form' (*Political* 20).

What these Lacanian influenced critical perspectives suggest is that history is not a fixed, transparent discourse, and that because 'temporality of the real is *nachträglich*, [retroactively constructed]', it produces a 'different, more complex notion of causality than the linear, Newtonian understanding of causation' (Dean 51) which underpins conventional, historicist methods. Deploying a nascent Lacanian conception of history allows this interpretation to move away from the idea that there is an inflexible correspondence between the text and a specific historical moment. It enables a literary analysis that can explore Conrad's figuration of the 'subject's complexity and mobility' (Marshall 1211) as Lacanian 'theory values literary texts as packed, patterned utterances that can reveal aspects of the subject outside the ego's containing structure' (1211).

It is even tempting to suggest that a theoretical approach is more truly historicist than the recent critical endeavours in historicism. In this sense, a Lacanian methodology is more faithful to the early intellectual trends of new historicism than the present historicist reductionism, as early new historicism uses theory for the rich, interpretive possibilities it opens up in its engagement with the text and offers new ways of reading literary works. Despite early new historicism being initially perceived as "anti-theory"—perhaps true in regards to the work of Derrida and Paul de Man—it is instead 'productively engaged' (Dunn and Haddox, 'Introduction' xx) with a variety of theoretical structures. In particular, it uses the work of Michel Foucault and the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, which enables new historicism to employ a 'methodological eclecticism' (Gallagher and Greenblatt, 'Introduction'

4) that is clearly far removed from a laborious, strictly empirical approach. Further, rather than utilising a reductive and limited historical model, the early period of new historicism uses a far broader conception of history, one which is sensitive to 'history's unpredictable galvanic appearances and disappearances' (4). Indeed, instead of irrevocably cementing a text to a precise historical moment, early new historicism questions the very possibility of 'successfully demarcat[ing]' (7) a historical period in the first place, or 'treating all of the traces of an era [...] as a single cultural formation' (7-8). It explicitly recognises that the 'relative positions of text and context often shift' (16), and, rather than reduce and restrict the process of literary analysis, new historicism's scholars actually attempt to 'widen the range of imaginative constructions to be interpreted' (30). In light of these comments, it is evident that a theoretical approach is clearly not indifferent to history but rather demonstrates the complex ways in which history is absorbed into the literary work, while rejecting a model of history that is constituted as a self-evident string of facts.

Joan Copjec's insights regarding Lacanian literary interpretation further highlight the inherent limitations of a historicist, empirical method of interpretation, and strengthen and develop a broader conception of subjectivity that is fundamental to reading Conrad's fiction. She argues that within a historicist analytical model there is 'a truth that cannot be tolerated' (Copjec 14)—which is the rejection of the idea of 'repression'—meaning that it is '*illiterate in desire*' (14). This refusal to recognise desire negates a fundamental dimension of the subject and offers a truncated analysis of a text. Copjec refers to the potential a Lacanian analytical approach offers as she draws attention to the idea that 'desire may register itself *negatively* in speech' – in the sense that 'the relation between [...] social surface and desire, may be a negative one' (14). This facet enables an interpretation to go beyond the merely empirical and to discern how subjective components such as desire are constituted between the individual and the socio-symbolic order in which the subject is embedded. For example, Copjec refers to 'products people b[uy] and [are] supposed to find pleasurable' (68), an

observation which can be easily verified in an empirical context through reference to eye-witness accounts, advertising and other social discourse. However, the Lacanian framework enables us to acknowledge and appreciate ‘the historical effects of the fact that men and women often act to avoid pleasure, to *shun* these goods’ (68). A strictly empirical approach limits the nature and breadth of interpretation and prevents an understanding of the complex dimensions of the subject – as Copjec suggests, a ‘dream of punishment may express a desire for what that punishment represses’ (14). It is only through a Lacanian interpretation that these various non-empirical factors may be discerned, as what Lacan enables is how to ‘read those [...] effects that cannot be subsumed under empiricism’ (Stonebridge, review of *Read My Desire*).

#### **Ahistoricism, authorial intentionality and the Lacanian interpretation**

However, before developing a Lacanian interpretation of Conrad’s depiction of subjectivity, it is necessary to recall and refute two frequent criticisms levelled towards psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic literary analysis. The first, the ‘idea that Lacanian theory is, by nature, anti-historical’, is, ‘of course, a common criticism’ (Stavakakis, *Lacanian Left* 61) that is frequently invoked. The second criticism which will be addressed concerns the idea of authorial intentionality. The first accusation—that psychoanalysis is fundamentally ahistorical—is, more precisely, that it fails ‘to consider cultural and historical specificity in the formulation of psychic laws and models’ (Dean 27). As Yannis Stavrakakis muses, ‘[i]sn’t psychoanalysis always implying a negation of history, with its acceptance, for example, of the universality of the Oedipus complex?’ (*Lacanian Left* 61).

In fact, Lacan is highly specific in addressing this very matter. Stavrakakis observes that ‘a close reading of Lacan’s texts reveals that structures and features like [the Oedipus complex] are presented by Lacan as arising at specific moments in history’ (61), and are not



posited as universal components existing across all cultures and time. Lacan actually argues that the Oedipus complex 'can obviously appear only in the patriarchal form of the family as an institution' (*Écrits* 150) and so requires a precise set of historical and societal circumstances in order to exist. According to Dylan Evans, by 'grounding psychic structure in historical processes, Lacan makes it clear that no account of subjectivity, psychoanalytic or otherwise, can claim an eternal ahistorical validity' (qtd. in Stavrakakis, *Lacanian Left* 61). Further, Lacan clearly situates his conception of the ego as a phenomenon of the Enlightenment and aligns it to the birth of Descartes' *cogito*. Evans observes that, for Lacan, the '*cogito* comes to stand for the modern western concept of the [ego]' and that 'it was born in the same era in which Descartes was writing (the mid-sixteenth to the early seventeenth century)' (26). These distinctions actually form one of the key strengths of a Lacanian approach, as it offers awareness of historical specificity without becoming reductive in conceptualising the subject.

This crucial sense of a historically aware dimension to Lacan's subject is also evident in that other component of psychoanalysis that is often derided as both ahistorical and unable to be scrutinised according to any kind of historical framework, the unconscious. Given that the Lacanian subject is investigated through the symbolic order of language means that there will always be a historical awareness in a psychoanalytic interpretation. Contrary to the popular misconception, Lacan 'identifies the unconscious as thoroughly historical, both conceptually and for the subject' (Dean 7). Fundamentally, Lacan's unconscious is 'linguistic and thus [...] transindividual' (Dean 7) and, as such, can be historically locatable in time. This process is predicated upon 'Lacan's imperative to study language [...] especially in the analysis of the subject and of human subjectivity' (Mellard 4), which means the analytical focus can only function through an unyielding 'attention to the symbolic inscription of historical events significant for the subject' (Dean 7). As Lacan states, the 'unconscious is that part of the concrete discourse, in so far as it is transindividual, that is not at the disposal of the subject in

reestablishing the continuity of his [or her] conscious discourse' (*Écrits* 214).

At its most basic level, what Lacan 'teach[es] the subject to recognise as [his or her<sup>3</sup>] unconscious is his [or her] history' (217). The fundamental part of Lacan's unconscious 'resides outside us, embedded within everyday institutions, media culture, and social practises' (Lewis 896) which comprise the 'symbolic domain of language and culture, which is necessarily transindividual yet also historical' (Dean 7). As such, it becomes markedly evident that—far from being ahistorical—Lacan's conceptual framework comprising the subject can be firmly located in precise, identifiable moments in history.

It is also necessary to consider the role of authorial intentionality in regards to the validity of a Lacanian interpretation of Conrad. As this thesis will claim that figurations of such Lacanian concepts as the *objet petit a*, desire of the Other and the fundamental fantasy are discernible in Conrad's fiction, the question of Conrad's actual intentions must be explored. In the first instance, it is tempting to claim that Conrad deliberately inscribes into the text patterns suggestive of Lacan's subject; that, in some sense, Conrad presciently intuits the rudiments of Lacanian psychoanalysis and weaves them into his work. However tempting this approach may be, questions of the level of authorial control over the text then present themselves – in addition to Conrad's well-known disinterest in Freudian psychoanalysis. Indeed, when in conversation with H.R. Lenormand on the island of Corsica, the author states that 'I want to look on reality as something rough and coarse over which I can pass my fingers' and avoid trying to 'get to the bottom' (Lenormand 7) of it. Lenormand himself notes that this dislike of psychoanalysis is abundantly evident as Conrad speaks of 'Freud with scornful irony' (7), and actually returns the loan of *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious* to the Frenchman 'without having opened them' (7). It is tempting to see Conrad's dismissal of Freud as, instead, a classic case of psychoanalytic disavowal – a 'mode of defence' in which the subject 'refus[es] to recognise the reality of a [troubling] perception' (Laplanche and Pontalis 118). If this perspective—that Conrad

intentionally incorporates these structures—is rejected, then the most plausible explanation remaining is that Conrad unconsciously put them there. Thus, their existence can be attributed to the workings of Conrad’s unconscious mind. Yet by pursuing this line of thought, one must directly engage with the question of the author’s intentions, and if meaning can exist in a text without the author having consciously placed it there.

Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels are the foremost proponents of the perspective that asserts the impossibility of the existence of meaning outside of the author’s intended meaning in any interpretive endeavour. In their seminal essay, “Against Theory”, they keenly refute all theoretical enterprises that interpret a text and suggest the presence of a meaning detached from the conscious intention of the author. By extension, this is clearly a fundamental rejection of psychoanalytic theory in literary studies, and one that must be directly confronted in order to legitimate a Lacanian reading of Conrad’s fiction. They claim that the ‘mistake made by theorists has been to imagine the possibility or desirability of moving from one term (the author’s intended meaning) to a second term (the text’s meaning), when actually the two terms are the same’ (Knapp and Michaels 724). Meaning can only ever be an intended meaning, deliberately positioned in the text by the author. At the most basic level, the ‘meaning of a text is simply identical to the author’s intended meaning’ (724) – they cannot be separated. Knapp and Michaels offer the example of a ‘wave poem’ (729), a hypothetical situation where a person stumbles across what appears to be a verse of poetry etched into the sand of a beach by the actions of the water. While these lines may look like poetry, Knapp and Michaels argue that without an author, they cannot be regarded as language or as having meaning – as they do not have the intention of an author animating them. As they state, to ‘deprive [the lines] of an author is to convert them into accidental likenesses of language’, and, due to this, they are not ‘an example of intentionless meaning; as soon as they become intentionless they become meaningless as well’ (728).

This argument appears to leave little space for a theoretical reading of a text, and

certainly would seem to invalidate the identification of a meaning extraneous to the intention of the author. However, Knapp's and Michaels' argument elides the central precept of a psychoanalytic reading and the pivot upon which the entire theoretical enterprise of Lacanian thought is predicated. Their conception of the author—the conscious, intentional agent—appears suspiciously similar to Lacan's ostensibly self-present ego – that superficially unitary consciousness that believes itself to be the entirety of the subject. Of course, from a Lacanian perspective, this is a reductive understanding of subjectivity and intentionality, as it occludes the unconscious mind and the subject of the unconscious. Accordingly, 'Lacan maintains that the ego is not at the centre' of the subject, because 'Freud's discovery of the unconscious removed the ego from the central position to which western philosophy [...] had traditionally assigned it' (Evans 52). It is perhaps more appropriate to speak of unconscious intentionality as an animating psychic agency, as it accords full weight to this enlarged conception of the subject as author.

This is not to claim that this interpretive activity is focused upon a constrictive, psychoanalytic reading of the text in terms of Conrad's unconscious mind only. This approach may produce a narrowly reductive reading, which "boils down" or condenses various textual components in his novels into encoded responses to, or expressions of, specific instances in Conrad's life – a limited, one-to-one correspondence between aspects of the text and aspects of the unconscious. Lacan is clear in stating that one cannot psychoanalyse a text to make observations about the life of the author, as he 'does not believe that it is possible or even desirable for psychoanalysts to say anything about the psychology of the artist on the basis of an examination of a work of art' (Evans 13). With this caveat in mind, Lacan's 'exclusion of the artist from his discussions of works of art means that his readings of literary texts are not concerned to reconstruct the author's intentions' (13). In Seminar II, Lacan is unambiguous about this facet of his psychoanalysis. He explicitly states that one 'must start from the text, start by treating it [...] as Holy Writ. The author, the scribe, is only a pen-pusher, and he

comes second. [The reader should] give more attention to the text than to the psychology of the author' (*Ego* 153).

With this focus on the text in mind, and for the purpose of literary criticism, one should therefore treat the text as if it has an unconscious, as a heuristic strategy enabling further investigation of Conrad's work. My contention is that a latent unconscious expresses itself on the surface of the text through certain signifiers and structural patterns. This is a critical approach that can be likened to Fredric Jameson's in *The Political Unconscious*, where he argues that there are unconscious structures that can be discerned in a text that extend beyond the individual moment of its creation and its creator. Jameson states that 'the individual text or cultural artefact', which initially has an 'appearance of autonomy', can be 'restructured as a field of force in which the dynamics of sign systems of several distinct modes of production can be registered and apprehended' (*Political* 84). Through an application of his theoretical model—primarily Marxist in nature—Jameson's method then reveals 'the active presence within the text of a number of discontinuous and heterogeneous formal processes' which are 'distinct from the ostensible or manifest content of the works' (84). Consequently, a Lacanian interpretation can examine the text outside of a constant consideration of Conrad's intentions, for the purposes of revealing broader, latent structures of subjectivity that may exist within it. This approach posits Conrad's work as a symbolic reflection of much wider cultural and ideological forces at work in the socio-symbolic order.

Of course, this method of interpretation is a form of deep reading – a model of analysis that has come under sustained criticism in recent years. Deep reading—a 'hermeneutics' that Paul Ricoeur argues operates via 'suspicion' (Ricoeur 30)—presupposes that the text harbours a buried secret, or, as some critics claim, that the 'meaning' of a text is 'hidden, repressed, deep, and in need of detection and disclosure by an interpreter' (Best and Marcus 1). Some of the most visible criticisms of the deep reading model have come from proponents of a contrasting form of analysis best known as 'surface reading' (9). They argue

that, in contrast to what they perceive as deep reading's assumption that the 'surface [of the text] is associated with the superficial and deceptive' (4), the literary critic does not need to apply 'theory to the text or gather texts that exemplify his theories' (8). Instead, it is 'enough simply to register what the text itself is saying' (8) as 'texts can reveal their own truths because texts mediate themselves' (11) – meaning can be taken at 'face value' (12) and is often self-evident. Further, the idea of a critical reading which uncovers the hidden machinations of a dominant capitalist ideology is declared 'superfluous', as years of explicit usage of American imperial power apparently supports the 'point that not all situations require the subtle ingenuity associated with symptomatic reading' (2) and that ideological manipulation is now transparent and immediately discernible.

However, as Carolyn Lesjak argues, this idea of surface reading mistakenly 'harkens back to a more innocent time of ordinary, commonsensical reading' which simply results in a 'complacent accommodation' (249) of the ideological status-quo. The function of criticism is inevitably simplified and 'reduced to stating the obvious, even as [adherents of surface reading] continue to fetishize the text in their celebration of its surface' (249). Clearly, a critical approach should not negate the importance of the surface of the text, but rather perhaps acknowledge that surfaces are 'never identical to themselves' (251). Instead of utilising a truncated critical method that seeks to elide the presence of ideology and the relationship of the text to wider symbolic forces, interpretation needs a more 'expansive reading practice' that involves 'more interpretation, more dialectical complexity' and a 'more rather than less invested critical position' (251). As Fredric Jameson notes, the 'very concept of objective appearance [...] warns us that any such resolution of the contradiction in favor of either essence or appearance, truth or falsehood, is tantamount to doing away with the ambiguous reality itself' (qtd. in Lesjak 264). Deep reading has in no way exhausted its effectiveness as it remains perhaps the most revelatory means of elucidating the ideological resonance of a text at a time when global capitalism has reached hitherto unforeseen levels

of influence. It is, in fact, of continued and vital relevance to literary analysis as the method of 'reading dialectically' enables interpretation 'to hold together the visceral, affective, and local textures of experience and the global, virtual, derivative-driven flows of capital' (Lesjak 264).

### **Why Conrad and Lacan?**

Having considered the limitations that a historicist critical method entails, outlined an alternative Lacanian conception of history and refuted some of the key criticisms levelled against Lacanian literary interpretation, it is now possible to more precisely focus upon how Conrad's fiction offers an elaborate and sophisticated depiction of the subject and why Lacan is best placed to access it. Clearly, it is necessary first to establish an awareness of the historical period in which Conrad is writing, so as to broaden and enrich an interpretation of his fiction. However, this approach is in sharp contrast to a standard historicist reading. Here, a sense of historical context is used as a point of departure to enable an interpretation to take place. Context offers a set of references within which Lacanian interpretive methods can operate – not a final critical horizon that circumscribes a text's meaning.

It is the confluence of multiple factors condensed within Conrad's moment of history as well as his figuration of the subject's response to these factors that makes him so available for a Lacanian reading. Regarded as a 'figure of transition', Conrad's 'work operates as a resonance chamber, registering the key issues of late-Victorian and Edwardian societies' (Acheraïou 256) such as empire, capitalism and incipient globalisation. As Alan H. Simmons notes, the author encounters first-hand the effects of imperialism and emergent transnational capitalism, and his novels 'demonstrate that the partitioning of the world by a handful of European states had economic and cultural dimensions never achieved on such a scale in history' ("Nationalism" 190). Conrad's world is fundamentally 'one in transition, and, in some places, in dramatic upheaval' (Stape, "Far East" 141) – his fiction unerringly captures

the unprecedented scale and nature of the relentless expansion of a global capitalist economy.

Indeed, the historical period of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in which Conrad writes sees 'the creation of a single global economy, progressively reaching into the most remote corners of the world' (Hobsbawm 62). This aggressive advance of capitalism—predicated upon never before seen levels of wealth and profit—forced its reach into these 'remote corners' of the world to discover and integrate new markets and resources. Through his own employment in the merchant navy, and by living in the world centre of capital and empire, London, Conrad bears witness to 'an increasingly dense web of economic transactions, communications and movements of goods, money and people linking the developed countries with each other and with the undeveloped world' (62). Of course, these cultural and economic shifts irrevocably reshape the face of Africa, Asia and Australasia – all regions that Conrad works within throughout his merchant career. Due to these travels, he is forced to perceive the 'overseas economic expansion and the exploitation of the overseas world [that are] crucial for capitalist countries' during this period (61); enriching the European nations driving this commercial process while simultaneously enacting 'violent, destabilizing contact' (Stape, "Far East" 141) upon indigenous populations. Conrad's fiction is sensitive to the dehumanising effects of these socio-economic changes, and his work presciently acknowledges emerging forces such as 'American imperialism and, with it, the face of Empire changing into global Capitalism' (Simmons, "Nationalism" 193).

Certainly, as a 'sailor in the British Merchant Service engaged in the practical realities of Empire, he [is] part of the great web of communication that assimilate[s] remote areas of the world into the British economy' (Simmons, "Politics" 196) and this period sees disparate trading evolve into a unified, integrated commercial system. Conrad would have seen the spread of the British 'rule of law', as well as 'technology and scientific knowledge transfer, and the discoveries attendant upon the industrial revolution' (Stape, "Far East" 140) –



crucially elements that are all subordinated to the needs of emergent global capitalism. The scale of these changes is unprecedented. For example, the 'world's merchant shipping [...] double[s]' from 16 million tons in the forty years after 1870 to over 30 million tons, as well as the world's railway 'expand[ing] from a little over 200,000 kilometres (1870) to over 1 million kilometres just before the First World War' (Hobsbawm 62). While the breadth of this development is clearly unparalleled, Conrad's own service in the merchant navy testifies to its dehumanising effects upon the individual. He personally experiences 'reduced rates for cargoes in the slow trades' and 'financially pinched ship-owners cut[ting] corners, sending ships out overloaded and with smaller crews' (Foulke 248) in the relentless quest for increased profit, so that 'relics like Conrad's Palestine put to sea for long voyages with dangerous cargoes' (248). It is the seismic scale of such changes and their effect upon the subject that his fiction registers and filters, as 'Conrad's specific settings relate to [these] much larger historical and cultural movements' (Ross, 'Introduction' 6).

Stephen Ross offers a highly relevant overview of how Conrad figures this interrelationship between these expansive, impersonal forces and their insidious effects upon the individual. However, Ross's work is primarily focused upon tracing the shift from the declining power of the nation-state to the emerging influence of transnational capital in the author's fiction. Certainly, while his analysis helpfully uses a select range of Lacanian concepts, it does not offer an extended, systematic reading of Conrad through a broad range of Lacanian theory which my thesis will demonstrate. Nevertheless, Ross keenly observes how Conrad's 'writing at once takes in [this] unrivalled range of settings and problems while remaining focused on individual experience of, and response to, modernity' (Ross, 'Introduction' 3). It is this distinction that is essential for appreciating the potential Conrad offers for a Lacanian reading – the author presents an intricate figuration of the subject affected by an 'ever-expanding capitalist imperialism', as well as the 'dehumanization attendant upon the establishment of a global capitalist hegemony' (1). Conrad's depiction of

socio-symbolic reality offers a sensitive 'understanding and critique of modernity [that is both] subjective and objective' (3), as his work uniquely demonstrates both the structure and composition of the capitalist and imperialist institutions that constitute social reality, while also presenting how the individual's subjectivity is interrelated with and subordinated to these forces.

Conrad's fiction exposes not only 'the interrelationship between the psychic and the social' (15) but further how 'ideological imperatives infiltrate characters' lives and configure their psyches' (20) – his protagonists, such as Almayer and Jim, show how the dominant ideologies of capitalism and imperialism shape their subjectivities on both a conscious and unconscious level. This quality of Conrad's fiction means his work 'articulate[s] a uniquely prescient conception of modernity' that includes both 'nation-state imperialist politics' but also the 'orientation toward an era of extranational global capitalism' (3) and their role in shaping subjectivity. Poised upon this shifting paradigm, his artistic project—frequently an extended investigation of a specific psyche—consequently 'reveals the increasingly pervasive and diffuse power of global capital to micromanage all aspects of individual and social life' (13). With the world-wide expansion of capitalism's economic structures and machinery, its psychic effects upon the subject are magnified exponentially. Further, this thesis will seek to show how Conrad's depiction of the relationship between the subject and emergent global capitalism is inextricably underpinned by rationally figured conceptions of space – and how space itself is a construct that is subordinated to the needs of capital. It is these social and subjective elements that Lacan is perfectly situated to detect and interpret.

Douglas Kerr observes that the 'theory revolution of the twentieth century was a belated attempt to rise to the challenge of the great Modernist writers', such as Conrad, and that '[n]ew critical languages seem to have been required to account for modern literature, with its fascination with forms of subjectivity and the unconscious' (45). Aligned with this view<sup>4</sup>, this thesis suggests that Conrad's writing functions as a prism that captures the

aforementioned historical forces and the refraction of subjective change that comes out of it, and it is Lacan's finely woven theory of subjectivity that is the best tool for eliciting this reshaping. The kinds of subjective reconfigurations that are happening in Conrad's moment of history are most strongly articulated through Lacan's theoretical model. More precisely, Lacan's theory 'place[s] particular emphasis on several elements that constitute us as individuals and social beings' (Mellard, 'Introduction' 3) and, as such, allows for a detailed illumination of how these elements interact within Conrad's fiction. This emphasis of Lacan's model 'include[s] the material and structural relations of the subject's "'I"' to the social "'other"' and the "'Other"' of the unconscious' (3), which enables the intricacies of Conrad's subjective depiction to be minutely exposed and explored. Importantly, the elements of Lacan's theory also 'include the individual's relations within the family and the social matrix' (3), so that not only does a Lacanian literary analysis allow the critic to recognise Conrad's figuration of a character's unconscious mind, it also enables him or her to identify and trace how this unconscious is configured both within a familial structure and the socio-symbolic order.

Lacan offers a model which reveals how as 'speaking subjects who inhabit language, we are all plunged, even before our birth, into a world of linguistic effects that are [...] momentous in that they determine our fate, from our first and last names to our most secret bodily symptoms' (Rabaté 8). This thesis will demonstrate how Conrad offers a textual depiction of social reality that enacts this process and how the individual subject is unaware of this determination, which is predicated upon the unseen 'discourse of the Other' (8). Lacan's analytical structure therefore enables a much more sophisticated reading of those 'tantalizing and often enigmatic biographical sketches Conrad provides for some of his key characters' (Ross, 'Introduction' 24), and how the familial and social discourses which surround his protagonists—discourses invariably determined by imperial capitalism—help define their position within and movement through the socio-symbolic order. Of course, it is

important to acknowledge the potential limits of the Lacanian analytical model, and to conceive of its possible incapacity to comprehend a certain text or event – an acknowledgement that Lacan himself makes explicit in Seminar XI. Lacan refers to the interpretive limits of psychoanalysis in terms of dream analysis, when he refers to what ‘Freud calls the navel—the *navel of the dreams*[—]to designate their ultimately unknown centre’ (*Four Concepts* 23, italics in original) – in any subject or text, there might remain an ‘irreducible’ point of incomprehension. Psychoanalytic literary interpretation certainly does not claim to be able to fully comprehend every textual or spoken utterance. Instead, it is aware of what Lacan also recognises as potential moments of ‘non-meaning’ (251) that lay beyond the limits of interpretation. Yet an awareness of this limit does not consequently define his model as a very restricted or inadequate one.

In fact, it is Lacan’s tripartite structure of the subject, composed through his orders of the symbolic, imaginary and the real, which is best placed to explicate the workings of Conrad’s depiction of subjectivity. It is this model that can reveal how the imaginary ego of Conrad’s subject—the conscious identity—interrelates with and is constituted by the symbolic order, or Other, of law, language and the ‘realm of culture’ (Evans 204) that extends beyond their individual existence. It is within the symbolic order that the signifier exists – an integral element of Lacan’s system. Signifiers can be understood as the ‘constitutive units’ of the symbolic order and as the ‘basic units of language’ (Evans 189). According to Lacan, they are the ‘differential elements’ (*Écrits* 418) that can be combined ‘according to the laws of a closed order’ (418). The role the signifier plays in such areas as socio-symbolic space and the subject will be examined in chapter four of this thesis. Further, it is by reference to Lacan’s real—which cannot be symbolised or positively depicted—that Conrad’s inscription of textual gaps and caesuras can be comprehensively accounted for – not in analytical isolation but as part of a fully-formed conceptualisation of subjectivity. The adjacent question of subjective autonomy is also relevant to address. The criticism that has often been levelled at

psychoanalysis is that it is determinist—presenting the subject as fully constituted by forces beyond his or her awareness or control. However, in the matter of autonomy, Lacan offers a more nuanced understanding of both the subject and its relationship to the socio-symbolic Other. Admittedly, while the Lacanian model certainly sees the consciousness of the subject *qua* ego as ‘determined by the symbolic order’ (Evans 15), the structure of Lacan’s subject goes well beyond that of the ego. It is the fundamental notion of Lacan’s project that psychoanalysis itself offers the means of liberating the subject away from the confines of the ego through a confrontation with its unconscious. In this method, the possibility of ‘autonomous subjectivity is provided the chance’ to ‘emerge at those junctures where the Real and/or the Symbolic’ becomes ‘barred’ or ‘inconsistent’ (Johnston, “Ghosts” 48) – opportunities made available through psychoanalytic analysis, or the movement from desire to drive which will be examined in due course.

These are not the only elements that an application of Lacan’s theory of subjectivity reveals in Conrad’s work. Lacan further elucidates how Conrad registers acute changes within the epistemological fabric constituting both symbolic reality and the subject. Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan observes that ‘new scientific developments yielded a sense of acute epistemological uncertainty’ (*Modern Temper* 12) during Conrad’s life. Particularly, she notes how the work of Darwin as well as ‘Lyell’s geological revolution, and Lord Kelvin’s second law of thermodynamics [...] paved the way for the scientific developments of the early 1900s’ such as the ‘theory of relativity, the quantum theory, and the theories of statistics and probability’ (12). These seismic shifts in science’s understanding of the composition and laws of existence fundamentally destabilise the ‘foundations of science itself with their introduction of unfixity and chance as the very principles which govern the ostensibly immutable laws of nature’ (12). Consequently, they would ‘challenge the prevailing view among scientists of a rational Newtonian universe’ (Rubery 240), and Conrad’s writing registers these factors by depicting a ‘cosmos’ that, at times, displays ‘spatial dislocations,

material instabilities, and temporal discontinuities' (Benson 138). Lacan's theory pays significant attention to these mathematically-inflected, rational components and the role they play in the construction of the subject's ego, helping to reveal the extent to which these factors are integrated within Conrad's depiction of the subject. In fact, this thesis will explore in detail how a Lacanian approach can detect within Conrad's text a figuration and critique of subjectivity that is predicated upon a highly rationalised model of Cartesian and Newtonian space.

### **The Lacanian interpretation of Conrad's fiction: four chapters on four novels**

The usage of Conrad's texts for this thesis is based upon the extent to which they enable the applicability of a wide range of Lacanian approaches, and how the texts can be productively read through various Lacanian themes. Indeed, a simplistic and rigid repetition of a limited range of Lacanian conceptual components would actually undermine and restrict the very purpose of the research – to demonstrate the validity and acuity of reading Conrad through Lacan. Similarly, using a limited choice of Conrad's texts from a narrow period of his career and then applying Lacanian theory might also weaken this aim. Accordingly, the selection of both Lacan's theory and Conrad's texts seeks to demonstrate that a complex multiplicity of Lacanian subjective elements is discernible across a range of Conrad's novels through time; from his first novel—*Almayer's Folly*—published in 1895, through to what is frequently considered his last major work, *Under Western Eyes*, published in 1911. *Almayer's Folly* enables this thesis to demonstrate that Conrad's work is available to a Lacanian interpretation from its earliest point in time, and it also offers a rich conceptual potential in terms of Lacan's subject of desire and model of female subjectivity. Therefore, it is a much more appropriate choice than, for example, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, which does not offer such a detailed presentation of subjectivity. Further, while *Nostromo* might encode aspects of

Lacan's Master's discourse, it does so without the comprehensiveness of *Under Western Eyes*, which offers the possibility of analysing all four discourses in detail. In addition, the text also presents one of Conrad's most developed female characters in Natalia Haldin, which differentiates it from 1913's *Chance* and the character of Miss de Barral.

Between these two novels, I have selected 1900's *Lord Jim* and 1907's *The Secret Agent*—unquestionably two of Conrad's greatest works—so as to clearly exhibit how the most complex Lacanian theory accesses and illuminates the most technically and conceptually sophisticated of Conrad's works. Of course, while the later *Victory* presents one instance of Conrad's engagement with philosophy, a much more productive opportunity is afforded by *The Secret Agent's* meticulous exploration of rationalism which enables a correspondence to be established with Lacan's subject of science, while *Lord Jim* uniquely offers a sustained depiction of the transition of the subject of desire into drive.

Utilising the structure of four chapters that focus on four novels allows a deep, meticulous dialogue to be developed between Conrad's texts and Lacan's theory, in the hope that this arrangement further supports the efficacy of a Lacanian approach and its relevance to Conrad. Importantly, this dialogue will also enable an appreciation of how Conrad's fiction in turn revitalises and enhances our perception and understanding of Lacan's own conceptual system. His prose realises not only fundamental aspects of Lacan's model of subjectivity but, further, delineates them enriched with an ideological dimension, as well as probing and developing psychoanalytic concepts—such as the subject of drive—beyond what Lacan himself theorised.

Each individual Lacanian concept will be explained in detail as it is deployed during the interpretation of the relevant text, so as to ensure a comprehensive and focused demonstration of its validity to a particular moment in Conrad's fiction. Certainly, this thesis is not an isolated attempt to interpret Conrad's writing via Lacan. It builds upon the work of a host of Lacanian-influenced scholars—such as Josiane Paccaud-Huguet, Carola Kaplan and

Stephen Ross—whose work will be vital for my own study. For example, Paccaud-Huguet offers a highly incisive article that reads *Lord Jim* through the key Lacanian concept of *das Ding*, while Kaplan analyses *The Secret Agent*'s central explosion as a form of the Lacanian real. Stephen Ross' book-length study of the eclipse of the nation-state by transnational capital, *Conrad and Empire*, helpfully demonstrates some of the critical possibilities offered by a reading of Conrad which utilises a select range of Lacanian concepts.

Further, this thesis relies on Lacan's texts via translation. Fortunately, precise English language versions of Lacan's body of work exists, translated by expert Lacanian scholars such as Bruce Fink and Russell Grigg. My analysis is enacted through these translations, and substantiated by cross-referencing these texts alongside the work of noted commentators—such as Slavoj Žižek, Ed Pluth and Justin Clemens, among others—to ensure the accuracy of conceptual application.

The first chapter of the thesis focuses on *Almayer's Folly*. This chapter shows how Conrad's earliest novel presents a nascent conception of his subject—delineated through the protagonist, Almayer—that, upon inspection, reveals a highly complex figuration comprising the constitutive elements of the foundational Lacanian subject, the subject of desire. This structure is Lacan's primary model of subjectivity. I establish how the progression of Conrad's narrative and his focus upon the workings of Almayer's mind—both conscious and unconscious—work in accordance with the fundamental components of the subject of desire. I use Almayer's perceptual engagement with the external world to exemplify Lacan's *objet petit a*, while Conrad's presentation of the character is shown to embody the Lacanian idea that the unconscious is the discourse of the Other. Further, I reveal how the nature and limitations of his desires and ambitions are forged in the linguistic Other of his parents' racist, colonial discourse by the identification of key images that Conrad inscribes into Almayer's speech and consciousness. The ideological imperatives of entrepreneurial capitalism, validated by figures such as Tom Lingard who enact Lacan's concept of the Name of the



Father, also help circumscribe and fix Almayer's identity. I demonstrate that it is this unyielding, unconscious, subservience to this ideology that generates such immense psychic pressure on Almayer, which leads to the collapse of his symbolic universe in the absence of the figures who help sustain it. His eventual descent into psychosis is delineated according to Lacan's concept of foreclosure. Subsequent to this analysis, I then explore Conrad's construction of the character of Nina in concert with the structure of Lacan's female subject, and, in particular, consider it in terms of Elizabeth Grosz's feminist critique of Lacan's model and her argument that Lacanian psychoanalysis maintains a system of patriarchy and male domination.

Building upon the interpretation of *Almayer's Folly*, the second chapter's analytical focus is *Lord Jim*, and how Conrad's writing exemplifies a key component of Lacan's developing model of subjectivity and its relationship to psychoanalytic ethics. Examining the establishment of Jim's subjectivity according to the dictates of imperial capitalism, partly embodied by his father and enacted through the merchant navy, the first section of the chapter reveals Jim's initial subjective position as a subject of desire. This chapter also introduces an integral component that interrelates with and helps constitute subjectivity in Conrad's fiction – that of the composition of the space of socio-symbolic reality. I show how a fundamental aspect of the subject's structure is predicated upon a highly specific, rationalised conception of space that Conrad introduces during the *Patna* sequence, and one that is subordinated to the ideological needs of imperialism and capitalism. After this analysis, I critically reevaluate Conrad's presentation of Jim's jump from the *Patna* by reading this event through Lacan. I demonstrate how Jim's leap—which has hitherto only been critically perceived as a moral failing—can now be understood as an exemplar of the Lacanian ethical act and a radical negation of conventional morality. The immediate psychological aftermath of Jim's jump is analysed through Cathy Caruth's Lacanian-influenced model of trauma theory in order to fully explore its effects upon Jim's subjectivity and to account for

the breakages in time and consciousness that Conrad inscribes into Jim's experiences. With the opportunity afforded by Lacan's conceptualisation of ethics, I reinterpret Jim's subsequent adventures in Patusan as an example of how a subject can achieve a new subjective structure beyond that of the subject of desire. This new structure is the subject of drive, a psychic model that enables the subject to enjoy a level of *jouissance* denied to the subject of desire.

Having analysed two key subjective structures within *Almayer's Folly* and *Lord Jim*, the third chapter of the thesis explores *The Secret Agent*. I offer an extended investigation of Conrad's use of a specific form of space that underpins and constitutes social reality in the text. The chapter develops how this model of space—composed of the mechanics of Cartesian and Newtonian rationalism—also informs and constitutes the consciousness of the subject that exists within it. In Lacanian terms, this is the subject of science, and the chapter then traces the presence within the novel of Lacan's rationally determined structure of consciousness. I reveal how the subject of science is inextricable from a specific means of conceptualising, apprehending and experiencing the world spatially that is predicated upon a form of Newtonian and Cartesian rationalism. Further, I show how Conrad deliberately disrupts these systems through his characteristic inscription of textual gaps and caesuras—most notably the central, yet absent, explosion—and therefore seeks to undermine and critique their ostensible claims to offer a fully comprehensible and transparent model of space and social reality, and, also, that consciousness is a secure means of apprehension. With reference to the work of Brian Rotman, I argue that Conrad subtly draws attention to the notion that mathematics and rationalism are themselves constructed intellectual systems and do not necessarily exist as timeless phenomena in an immutable, idealist realm. This chapter also reveals that Conrad suggests that this form of rationalism is inherently interrelated with and subject to the requirements of emergent global capitalism. Conrad's subtle use of and encoded reference to these forms of rationalism are located within *The*

*Secret Agent's* engagement with irony and, as such, I contend that Conrad's text harbours a previously undiscovered level of irony that clearly exposes the deficiencies of a particular model of rationalism.

The final chapter of this thesis is an interpretation of *Under Western Eyes* via Lacan's model of the four discourses. I locate the four discourse positions of the University, the Master, the Hysteric and the Analyst within the text and use them as a means of explaining the ideologically determined motivations and perspectives of the characters. I situate the novel's major characters, such as Razumov and Natalia, as well as more minor characters such as Tekla, General T--- and Mikulin, within a specific position of Lacan's matrix, and I reveal how their subjective structures and personal communication exhibit ideological and intellectual tendencies characteristic of their relevant discourse location. My analysis also focuses on the structure and power of the dominant ideology Conrad depicts within the text, and how characters act according to whether they are either constituted within or situated against this ideology. I then utilise Slavoj Žižek's interpretation of Lacan's master signifiers as a means of elucidating how varying ideologies—such as western democracy and Russian Tsarism—attempt to produce and control meaning within socio-symbolic reality. Also, the capacity of the subject to traverse various subject positions is revealed through a detailed examination of specific textual moments. For example, Razumov's subjective location will be identified as he is established within the dominant ideology of the University's and Master's discourse, and I then show how his subject position and perspective is eventually reconfigured following his experiences with Victor and Natalia Haldin. Further, I demonstrate how Conrad's choice of setting and the deeper structures of *Under Western Eyes* also operate according to Lacan's model of the four discourses.

Finally, my conclusion reflects and comments upon the implications of the presence of these various modes of Lacanian subjectivity—desire, drive and science—that I have

identified and traced within Conrad's fiction, and also considers further works and authors of modernist literature that might benefit from a sustained Lacanian reading.



## Chapter One: *Almayer's Folly* and Lacan's Subject of Desire

### Critical context of *Almayer's Folly*

Conrad's first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, was long seen as a mere minor work in his *oeuvre*, primarily due to the influential criticism forged by the first few generations of Conrad scholars. Figures that have become canonical to the study of the author—such as Albert J. Guerard, Thomas Moser and F.R. Leavis—pay scant attention to Conrad's novelistic debut. Indeed, what has become known as Conrad's "major phase", a coinage derived from Berthoud's 1978 study, utterly excludes his early works. This relegates *Almayer's Folly*, at best, to unfairly reside at the periphery of modernism. Moser simply damns it as 'apprentice work' (50), while Leavis deems it barely worthy of sustained critique, grouping it with what he famously labels as the other 'excessively adjectival studies in the Malayan exotic of Conrad's earliest vein' (190).

More recent critical efforts have attempted to recover and resituate the text, citing it as an emblematic work of nascent modernism. Andrea White's study, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition: Constructing and Deconstructing the Imperial Subject* is perhaps one of the most influential examples of this revisionist approach, and revelatory in how it conceives of Conrad's early Malay fiction as powerfully and intentionally undermining the romance genre of the late Victorian period. Situating Conrad as a kind of mutinous presence within this genre, White sees his writing as a deliberate attempt to subvert the 'basic tenets' of romance to the extent that his fiction becomes an 'attack on the tenets central to the discourse' (120) of imperialism itself. Further political and ideological resonances in the novel are discerned by Gene M. Moore, who tellingly observes that the 'focus on the Malay works as exotic romances has made it difficult to appreciate their value as *political* novels [...] in what they

can tell us about the stateless and dispossessed' (21). It is perhaps alongside this notional realignment of critical perspective that a Lacanian analysis of the novel may be situated, and where questions of ideology and subjectivity can be foregrounded.

It is possible to see Christopher Lane's engagement with *Almayer's Folly* moving towards these intertwined concerns, as he analyses Conrad's depiction of subjectivity through a psychoanalytic framework. The contention that 'Conrad's work cannot show the constitutive parts of individual sovereignty (transference, fantasy, drive, and so on) without simultaneously representing colonialism and the unconscious as mutually involved entities' (Lane, "Almayer's Defeat" 405) suggests that an analysis of the subject is inextricable from a commensurate engagement with colonial ideology. It is in light of such a comment that it becomes feasible to propose that *Almayer's Folly* offers an elaborate figuration of the workings of the subjectivity of its protagonist as intimately bound up with and actuated through structures of colonial, imperial ideology in a complex inter-relationship.

The deployment of a Lacanian analysis might appear to be useful as a means of unlocking these ideologically determined depictions of subjectivity – a subjectivity constituted within Conrad's depiction of socio-symbolic reality in the Malay Archipelago. Of course, while it is crucial to acknowledge early critical claims that *Almayer's Folly* lacks the conceptual sophistication and stylistic refinement of later works such as *Lord Jim* or *The Secret Agent*, such claims should not preclude critical endeavours to access what, from a psychoanalytic standpoint, can be conceived of as the rich interpretive potential of the novel – potential hinted at by the aforementioned, recent studies. In fact, it is from this very standpoint that Conrad's first novel may reveal the intricate figuration of an individual psyche that exhibits the more foundational components of the Lacanian subject. Consequently, this first chapter of my thesis will elucidate how Conrad appears to be writing in accordance with basic Lacanian categories confined within conventional discourse, in contrast to the author's later, more complex fiction, which appears to harbour the more recondite strands of

Lacanian theory.

As such, the presence of major Lacanian concepts such as the *objet petit a*, fantasy, the desire of the Other, the Name of the Father, and foreclosure will all be correspondingly located and examined, and their inter-relationship established, in order to expose the structure of the subject's psyche as depicted by Conrad. It is a structure that is perhaps the most fundamental of Lacan's early models of the subject – the subject of desire. It will be demonstrated that Almayer's subjectivity is constituted and organised by his desire—which operates according to the principle of metonymy—and that this desire is contextualised via his fantasy space. Further, the character of Nina will also be explored in conjunction with Lacan's model of female subjectivity—including such elements as feminine jouissance—and its relationship to the male subject.

Almayer, the 'languid' dreamer sustained by fantasies of wealth and success, who in his self-image or ego 'believe[s] he [is] a strong man [with] unflinching firmness' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 135), is a subject whose very being is unwittingly determined through a socio-symbolic reality defined by imperial capitalism. He is a character constituted through an ideological inheritance bequeathed by his colonial parentage, whose innermost fantasies and longings are irrevocably and unknowingly coordinated by the network of desires that surrounds him.

### **Almayer, fantasy and desire**

The plot of the novel explores the fate of Almayer, a Dutch colonialist in Borneo, taken on as protégé when a young man by the once successful English adventurer, Lingard, and seduced into marrying the older trader's adopted Malay daughter by promises of future fortune. Conrad depicts a now middle-aged Almayer's futile struggles to maintain his ever-



diminishing business in the face of the constant intrigues undertaken by successful local Arab trader, Lakamba, and his own chronic inertia. This occurs during a final attempt to realise his dreams of fortune with his partner, Balinese nobleman, Dain Maroola, who entertains designs on Almayer's daughter.

The opening of Conrad's first chapter depicts an elaborately wrought representation of Almayer's consciousness. Aging, and bereft of his mentor, Lingard, Almayer 'shuffle[s] uneasily' (*Almayer's* 7) alone upon the river bank – a passive mind willingly absorbed in the solitude of contemplation. What becomes immediately striking is the manner in which Conrad introduces his eponymous protagonist, as it strongly accords with one of the central precepts of Lacanian theory – that of desire. For Lacan, '*desire is the essence of man* [italics in original]' (Lacan, *Four Concepts* 275) and it is the most basic and inescapable aspect of Lacanian psychoanalysis and the subject. Thus the novel's initial sequence offers a fertile moment for extrapolating the psyche of Almayer. Conrad suggestively structures the character's perception as explicitly permeated and modulated by his desire, as he 'absorb[s] himself in his dream of wealth and power away from this coast' (*Almayer's* 7) in Borneo – a luxuriant 'dream of [a] splendid future' (7). By analysing Conrad's presentation of this desire, both Almayer's *objet petit a*, as well as the fantasy space that enables the movement of his desire can be elucidated.

Conrad's depiction of Almayer sees him 'looking fixedly' (7) at the river before him, where he is quickly established as a character who 'finds his only consolation in dreams, and in visions of gain' (Hicks 22) that will never be realised. It is during this moment of silent reflection, that the author reveals this stare upon this river to elicit—within Almayer's imagination—a connection between the play of the sun's light upon the water and the precious metal of gold. Conrad illustrates how the Dutchman 'like[s] to look at it about the time of sunset; perhaps because at that time the sinking sun would spread a glowing gold tinge on the waters [...] and Almayer's thoughts [are] often busy with gold' (*Almayer's* 7).

Clearly, on one level, this obviously presents the idea that this gold is an 'illusion – a fleeting effect of the setting sun [and] a mirage' (Lester, 'Introduction' x), and this illusory quality inscribed into the river appropriately foreshadows Almayer's eventual failure to attain fortune in the novel. However, from a Lacanian perspective, this moment encodes a strong subjective association between an objective, geographical feature—the river—and a material that clearly resonates with the desire of Almayer – gold. Despite the river, in and of itself, having no intrinsic value, a value appears to be inscribed into Almayer's perception of it.

Here, at this moment, one can begin to trace the contours of the *objet petit a* flickering within the mind of the protagonist, enacting its 'function of symbolising the central lack of desire' (Lacan, *Four Concepts* 105) for the subject. It is the primary object-cause of Almayer's desire and the central object which drives his very being – a river leading to the legendary 'Gunong Mas – the mountain of gold' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 61). This mysterious river and mountain of Almayer's *objet petit a* originate from 'scraps of information contained in old Lingard's pocketbook' (47) which speak of a certain route upriver 'whose entrance only [Lingard] himself knew' (10), leading to a hidden treasure. Almayer refers to the river as the 'promised land' (10) – a phrase which reflects its importance in his subjective economy. Crucially, this route upriver—and mountain of gold—is constructed by Conrad as a structuring absence: it occupies no positively determined reality and it is given no textual presence in the narrative, as it remains undiscovered and perhaps even non-existent. Yet it functions as a crucial pivot upon which Almayer's subjectivity is anchored and acts as the cause of Almayer's desire.

This structuring absence precisely accords with the key aspects of Lacan's object-cause of desire, as the *objet petit a* is 'an empty place [...] a pure semblance: in itself it is totally indifferent and, by structural necessity, absent' (Žižek, *Sublime* 206). Despite this absence, it sets 'in motion the symbolic movement of interpretation [and remains] a void in the centre of the symbolic order' (209). Appropriately, Conrad depicts Almayer as obsessed

with its discovery which drives the narrative forward, as the Dutchman 'studie[s] the crabbed handwriting' of Lingard's notebook about the river and 'often gr[ows] meditative over it' (*Almayer's* 27). He organises 'feverish activity' (46) to prepare for an expedition to discover 'the rich gold-mine, for that place where he had only to stoop to gather up an immense fortune and realise the dreams of his young days' (47) about which Lingard's notes seem to offer cryptic references. On a broader textual level, Conrad also presents this river and mountain as an object-cause of desire for the rival trader, Lakamba. The author clearly ascribes Almayer 'owing his life only to his supposed knowledge of Lingard's valuable secret' (23) which spares him being murdered by the Arab merchant. Further, Almayer's movements as he prepares for this journey 'were no doubt closely watched by Lakamba and Abdulla, for the man once in the confidence of [Lingard] was supposed to be in possession of valuable secrets' (30).

One further aspect of this opening description of the Dutchman that strongly supports a Lacanian interpretation is how Almayer's *objet petit a*—the river and mountain of gold—is not presented by Conrad as an isolated element within his psyche, or as a passing fancy detached from any wider consideration. Rather, Conrad explicitly situates these components as operating within the more comprehensive context of Almayer's fantasy. Specifically, they are factors that, once attained, will enable Almayer's realisation of his fantasy to 'live in Europe, him and his daughter. They would be rich and respected [and] he would forget the twenty-five years of heart-breaking struggle upon this coast' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 8). This discovery of treasure has value only in terms of actuating Almayer's broader fantasy to triumphantly return to Europe in splendour. Conrad's contextualisation of the object-cause of desire within Almayer's fantasy suggestively corresponds to how the Lacanian structure of fantasy operates for the subject of desire. In the Lacanian model, it is 'precisely the role of fantasy to give the coordinates of the subject's desire, to specify its object, to locate the position the subject assumes in it. It is only through fantasy that the

subject is constituted as desiring' (Žižek, *Awry* 6). Consequently, for Almayer, his fantasy to return to Europe offers the 'coordinates' of his desire and helps to 'specify its object', which is the river leading to the mountain of gold – the element required to realise this fantasy of the successful colonialist returning to his cultural home. The significance of gold in the novel is considerable, and I draw on the work of Jean-Joseph Goux to analyse this element later in the chapter.

At this juncture, it is important to briefly touch upon Conrad's figuration of socio-symbolic space in the novel and how the subject is presented as relating to this space. In *Almayer's Folly*, Conrad's conception of this relationship remains understandably embryonic, as he is yet to deepen and extend his exploration of this area in the sophisticated manner which characterises later works such as *Lord Jim* and *The Secret Agent*. Accordingly, this facet of his writing will be much more comprehensively discussed in my subsequent chapters on those particular novels, where the co-extensiveness of subjectivity to the socio-symbolic order in which it is constituted becomes a fundamental consideration of Conrad's prose, and a consideration which can be aligned with the more esoteric aspects of Lacanian theory. At this early stage of his career, however, one can suggest that the socio-symbolic space in the text—the colonised space of Malaysia processed through imperialism—appears perceptible only in terms of capitalist trade. Certainly, as already discussed, Conrad's presentation of how Almayer first conceives of the river establishes it as a potential means of obtaining treasure. It is also whispered of in hushed tones by the merchant Hudig solely as a potential source of wealth – sailed upon by Lingard with his 'assorted cargo of Manchester goods, brass gongs, rifles and gunpowder' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 10). The old merchant's impressed whisper helps elevate it into an object of supreme desire for Almayer. Hudig states that Lingard has 'lots of money; more than Hudig [for] he has discovered a river' (10).

Indeed, the wider locale of the colonised Malayan region is similarly constituted as a strictly capitalist, entrepreneurial space. During one voyage of Lingard and Almayer upon the

‘silent sleeping coast’ of Borneo, Conrad describes the ‘smooth black surface of the sea’ as having ‘a great bar of gold laid on it by the rising moon’ (12). The colonised space of Malaysia is only perceived as a possible avenue of trade, and as the apogee of colonial mercantile adventure. Most tellingly, Conrad textures Almayer’s conscious recollections of Hudig’s offices—where he spent his boyhood learning his trade as a merchant—in language inseparable from that of the movement of the river as a source of capitalist gain. There is an aesthetic confluence between the motion of the mind and the river; Almayer imagines the office’s ‘soft and continuous clink of silver guilders’ (8) and the ‘musical chink of broad silver pieces streaming ceaselessly’ (8) throughout Hudig’s warehouse. The words ‘soft’, ‘continuous’ and ‘ceaselessly streaming’ all suggest the motion of water inculcated with the continuing, ceaseless trade of the silver of capitalist exchange. Hudig’s warehouse itself is defined in a markedly rationalised manner by Conrad – it is organised in ‘long and straight avenues’ with its ‘little railed-off spaces’ (8). Further, even Hudig’s Malay assistant is presented in a similarly ordered fashion as his hand ‘moved up and down with the regularity of a machine’ (9). Throughout this sequence, Conrad presents Almayer’s consciousness as incapable of processing and perceiving Malayan space as anything other than a commercial, rational entity – a conception markedly developed in *Lord Jim*.

### **The metonymy of Almayer’s desire and the gaze**

For Lacan, the subject’s desire is regulated according to the concept of metonymy – the movement of desire onto other objects. As Lacan states, the ‘properly metonymic relation between one signifier and another that we call desire is [...] the change of object’ (Lacan, *Ethics* 293). Desire is not static or fixed, as metonymy enables a subject’s desire to inhabit other objects. Consequently, although there is ‘only one object of desire, OBJET PETIT A’, this object of desire can be further ‘represented by a variety of partial objects in different

partial drives' (Evans 37). This potential movement certainly does not invalidate, for example, Almayer's object of desire *qua* the river and mountain of gold—unquestionably the most significant one in the novel—but rather suggests that Almayer's desire may come to rest upon additional objects which still represent the same fantasy. This explains why Almayer's desire, which is consistent throughout the text—a fantasy of leaving the settlement with riches—can shift onto different objects. This shift indicative of desire primarily occurs through the subject's visual perception, as per Lacan's observation that the subject's 'domain of vision has been integrated into the field of desire' (*Four Concepts* 85).

It is highly telling that Conrad appears to inscribe this metonymic movement of desire into Almayer's visual field during his contemplation of a drifting tree in the river. Conrad describes how 'there [i]s no tinge of gold on [the river] this evening' (*Almayer's* 7), so that 'Almayer, neglecting his dream, watche[s a drifting tree] with languid interest' (7). At the very moment Almayer chooses to divert his attention from his dream of wealth to observe the tree, his attention is arrested. This is due to the tree, which starts 'raising upwards a long denuded branch, like a hand lifted in mute appeal to heaven against the river's brutal and unnecessary violence' (8). As a result, Almayer's interest in the branch 'increase[s] rapidly' (8) as he sees its 'course [i]s free down to the sea and he envie[s] the lot of that inanimate thing' (8). Conrad's simile of the branch likened to a 'hand lifted in mute appeal to heaven', and its apparent freedom, seems to articulate Almayer's own desire to escape – clearly an aspect of his fantasy. He envisages the branch floating 'till it drift[s] in sight of Celebes, as far as Macassar, perhaps' and then remembers himself, young and free, standing on the 'dusty jetty of Macassar' (8) twenty years before the present. Most important, however, is that this desire is thoroughly inscribed into *his perception of the reality* of the branch. Again, this occurs in a manner similar to Almayer's prior association between the river—another objective geographical feature with no inherent worth—and gold. Here, however, it is the branch that assumes a value in his subjective economy and briefly becomes an 'evanescent'

(Lacan, *Four Concepts* 105) object of desire. This exemplifies another facet of the *objet petit a* – how it can only be located via a subject's gaze which is “‘distorted’” by desire’, as it ‘does not exist for an “‘objective’” gaze’ (Žižek, Awry 12). This is due to the fact that the *objet petit a* is simply the ‘materialization of this very distortion, of this surplus of confusion and perturbation introduced by desire into so-called “‘objective reality’” (12), in this case the branch that appears like a hand beckoning for freedom.

Encoded within Conrad's very precise figuration of Almayer's perception of the branch, one can subtly discern Lacan's *objet petit a* in the form of the gaze. The branch here may be likened to the famous sardine can from Lacan's Seminar XI. At the most superficial level, the branch is also a random, stray object that is observed bobbing in the water by Almayer, much in the same way Lacan notices a ‘sardine can [that] floated there in the sun’ (*Four Concepts* 95). What Lacan theorises about this object strongly resonates with Conrad's description of Almayer and the branch. Lacan recognises that despite seeing the sardine can, this object ‘is in no way mastered by me. It is rather it that grasps me, solicits me at every moment, and makes of the landscape something other than a landscape’ (96). The gaze, which looks back at the subject, has a transformative capacity that appears equally discernible in how Conrad illustrates the landscape changing for Almayer. Lacan explains that ‘[f]rom the moment that this gaze appears, the subject tries to adapt himself to it, he becomes that punctiform object, that point of vanishing being’ (83). If this is the case, then the ‘hand lifted in mute appeal’ to heaven inscribed into the branch appears to be the hand of Almayer himself. Almayer ‘adapts’ himself and ‘becomes that punctiform object’ which is the branch in the water. From a Lacanian perspective, this is perhaps the earliest moment in Conrad where the subjectivity of the protagonist is shown to be externalised and constituted outside of himself. It is a conception that will be analysed in depth in my chapter on *The Secret Agent*, where Conrad offers his most sophisticated depiction of this inter-relationship.

What I have attempted up until this point is to reveal how Conrad's initial

presentation of Almayer seems to correlate with the most conventional aspects of Lacan's subject of desire. It is incontestable that these fantasies are to become a wealthy and successful colonialist with his daughter, Nina. Further, it is within this frame that the objects of his fantasy can be specified. Of course, the most significant of these is the *objet petit a* qua river and mountain of gold that will enable Almayer's triumphant homecoming. What remains now is to locate and establish the aetiology of this desire – the point from which it came to define and constitute Almayer's subjectivity and position within the socio-symbolic order. In order to reveal this aetiology, it is necessary to refer to Lacan's structure of the fundamental fantasy—the subject's fantasy in its most essential, foundational form—and also to reveal the network of colonial ideology which sustains this structure.

#### **Almayer's desire of the (m)Other and the fundamental fantasy**

Conrad offers a brief sketch of Almayer's parentage – a possible clue towards this aetiology that might easily be overlooked at first glance. It is through an analysis of this moment that one can begin to discern how the genesis of Almayer's desire appears to accord with one of the best known formulas of Lacanian psychoanalysis, that '*man's desire is the desire of the Other* [italics in original]' (Lacan, *Four Concepts* 115).

As Almayer dreams of his youth, he recalls that his 'father grumbled all day at the stupidity of native gardeners, and the mother from the depths of her long easy-chair bewailed the lost glories of Amsterdam, where she had been brought up, and of her position as the daughter of a cigar dealer there' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 8). Within this barest of outlines is enmeshed multiple strands of a colonial discourse involving economic, social and racial elements that interconnect and appear to shape Almayer's world-view. Firstly, the reference to the 'stupidity of native[s]' articulates the racist assumptions of the European colonialist and the arrogant prejudices of a supposed superiority. It also implies a perceived inability of the natives to cultivate nature—"to garden"—and therefore situates them closer to notions



of “untamed, savage nature” and identifies them as only capable of menial work.

Subsequently, Almayer is clearly depicted by Conrad as a slave-owning, racist trader with few moral scruples regarding slavery. He refers to his Malay servants as ‘[m]y own people’ and Conrad designates them his ‘domestic slaves’ (*Almayer’s* 15), while Abdulla’s suggestion of a proposed marriage between his nephew, Reshid, and Nina, leaves Almayer ‘dumbfounded’ (35), and ‘[b]urning with the desire to take Abdulla by the throat’ (36) at the merest thought of an inter-racial relationship.

This racism and supposed cultural superiority is confirmed by the mother’s unpleasant lamentations for the ‘lost glories of Europe’. This imagined glory elevates the spatial and cultural symbolic system of Europe—specifically Holland—above the symbolic system of Malaysia, where the Almayers then resided, through a ‘differential logic’ (Ragland, qtd. in Mellard 81) of implied comparison. Convincingly, the mother’s ‘position’ as the ‘daughter of a cigar dealer’ carries significant imperialist dogma. It is demonstrative of a lauded social status uniquely that of the middle classes of merchant Europe. Amsterdam was a major tobacco trading city, and an economy heavily dependent upon colonial trade, expansion and slavery. Conrad is precise in the reference to cigar dealing, as traditionally the tobacco trade operated in close concert with the slave trade. Historically, the ‘expansion of tobacco production could not have taken place without enormous growth in the size of the slave labour force’ (“American Slavery”), and the ‘Dutch *entrepôt* remained the central reservoir for all tobaccos’ (Israel 266) within the European marketplace. This ugly underside of the tobacco trade is simply elided by the mother as a mere ‘lost glory’, which supports the assertion that Conrad presents his ‘white characters blinded by their own racial and cultural prerogatives’ (Moore 22).

It is in this brief description of his familial circumstances that one can start to locate the origin of Almayer’s desire for a return to Europe and his colonial perspective, and an application of Lacan’s theory of the mother/child relationship further support this idea. The

Lacanian subject begins as a subject of lack – a desiring subject through the relationship to its mother:

Lack and desire are coextensive for Lacan. The child devotes considerable effort to filling up the whole of the mother's lack, her whole space of desire [...] Her wish is their command, her desire their demand. Their desire is born in complete subordination to hers. (Fink, *Subject* 54)

Feasibly then, the influence of the mother cannot be underestimated, as it is a dominant, fashioning instrument in the advent of the subject's desire. Lacan likens it to an 'omnipotence', and this foundational shaping 'must be related back to the Mother' ("Hamlet" 12). His famous pronouncement on man's relation to desire and the other is adroitly explicated by Fink, as 'Man learns to desire *as an other*, as if he were some other person [italics in original]' (*Subject* 54), and in this case we can apply it to the textual situation of Almayer and his mother. How else can we then perceive Almayer's later assertion, when he talks to Nina of the life ahead of them, except as this desire of the 'mOther' (Fink, *Subject* 84)? This is most evident when Conrad describes Almayer as suggesting, 'you cannot imagine what is before you. I myself have not been to Europe, but I have heard my mother talk so often that I seem to know all about it' (*Almayer's* 17). The implication is evident – Conrad appears to hint that Almayer's fantasies have been established by the mother and the associated imperialist dogma.

In the Lacanian model, the 'omnipotence' of the mother's influence is clearly visible in establishing the psychic economy of the subject of desire. As the child breaks away from the 'hypothetical mother-child unity' in the process of separation, this 'rift leads to the advent of object a' (Fink, *Subject* 59). The child retains a sliver of that prior unity in the form of the *objet petit a*, as it is the 'remainder produced' (Fink, *Subject* 59) when the unity breaks

apart. It remains present, mediated through the screen of fantasy. This whole process is inextricably predicated upon the figure of the mother for Lacan.

At this point, affinities of the novel with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* can be sharply drawn, beyond the obvious, incessant hesitation and inaction of Almayer. Conrad's protagonist is indelibly etched in the frame of his mother's desire, and Lacan's observation regarding Hamlet appears equally valid for Almayer: '[i]t is not his desire for his mother, it is his mother's desire' (qtd. in Rabaté 62-3) that steers him. One seemingly innocuous exchange between Almayer and Nina appears to attest to this fundamental role the mother's desire occupies in the subjective structure of the son, while also seeming to replicate the workings of the Lacanian unconscious. Directly following the above comment to his daughter, Almayer appears to struggle for the appropriate word to conclude his ambitions; he remarks regarding himself and Nina that 'we shall live a – a glorious life' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 17). The textual pause or flicker, 'a – a', then the signifier 'glorious' – appears to be an anaphoric reference by Conrad back to his mother's continued discourse on the 'glories' of Europe. In a Lacanian context, it is also the momentary breach; a flash of the classical Lacanian subject of the unconscious.

We can refer here back to the discussion around Lacan's notion of the split subject and its accompanying schema. According to that schema, the subject is inherently split between the ego and the unconscious. It is split between 'an ineluctably false sense of self and the automatic functioning of language (the signifying chain) in the unconscious' (Fink, *Subject* 45), articulated by Lacan in the algebraic symbol of  $\$$ . This gives a 'surface' with 'two sides: one that is exposed and one that is hidden' (47). The appearance of the subject of the unconscious 'comes into being only momentarily, as a sort of pulse-like movement' towards the ego. As Fink argues, this 'pulsation-like shift' seems to be the 'realisation' (48) of the Lacanian subject, but this brief movement, 'seems to be destined, by a sort of pre-emption, to close up again upon itself' (Lacan, *Four Concepts* 43). The textual patterning of Conrad's

prose enables one to see the eruption of the signifier 'glory', prefaced as it was by the stutter of Almayer, as an example of Lacan's '*pulsative* function [italics in original]' (43) – from Almayer's unconscious into his ego. It is an unconscious composed of signifying material relentlessly hammered in by the speech of the mother, and a moment which perhaps reveals another implication of Christopher Lane's suggestion that 'colonialism and the unconscious [are] mutually involved entities' (Lane, "Almayer's Defeat" 405).

When considered via a Lacanian framework, even the etymology of Almayer's forename, 'Kaspar', reveals a hitherto unacknowledged significance. Its etymological origin means 'treasurer' (Sheard 306) or 'treasure-holder'. On one hand, it is reasonable to suggest that Conrad might ironically play upon this etymology, given the failure of Almayer to discover the treasure hinted at in Lingard's notes. Alternatively, in a Lacanian sense, the name of the subject carries a more directional implication. In the process of alienation, one witnesses the 'assignation of a place' (Fink, *Subject* 52) for the subject within the socio-symbolic order. This place is represented by a signifier, and this 'empty set as the subject's place holder within the symbolic order is not unrelated to the subject's proper name' (53). Of clear relevance is that in time, 'this signifier [...] will go to the root of his or her being and become inextricably tied to his or her subjectivity' (53). On some level, Almayer's desire may be a desire to subjectify his name and to become that which his name represents – the desire inscribed into him through the maternal discourse.

It is by drawing together these various subjective strands that constitute Almayer's psyche that the outline of his fundamental fantasy becomes evident – a conventional Lacanian structure that governs the workings of the subject of desire. In Lacanian theory, the fundamental fantasy is the most essential form of the subject's fantasy, a foundational form of which his various and separate fantasies are discrete derivations. It is where the subject's 'individual fantasies' collectively comprise 'the subject's most profound relation to the Other's desire' (Fink, *Subject* 62). This 'profound relation' is inevitably constituted within and

subservient to the parental discourse which surrounds the subject. Almayer's 'individual fantasies', identified above, all invariably include amassing wealth, in order to enjoy a 'splendid future existence for himself and Nina' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 47), and to 'pass the evening of his days in expressible splendour' (11). More importantly, these fantasies are subordinated to the central outcome of returning to Europe to live a 'glorious life' (17) and be 'rich and respected' (7). All of Almayer's fantasies feed into this chief aim, as he works towards reaching the 'paradise of Europe [that] was awaiting the future Eastern millionaire' (48).

The fundamental fantasy is founded 'by desire as it forms in language on the basis of the Other's discourse, which transmits the Other's desires, values and ideals' (Fink, *Clinical* 208) into the subject. For Almayer, these values and ideals are the racist beliefs and colonial idealisation of a supposed European superiority in contrast to native Malay culture. Given the recurrent elements *qua* wealth and Europe that appear in his varied fantasies, and the content of the 'Other's discourse', it is feasible to assert that his fundamental fantasy is to realise the desire of the mother to return to Europe and relive the 'lost glories' which she believes it offered to her own life. Consequently, Almayer's innermost longings are a product of the imposition of his mother's desire upon his own subjectivity. An appropriate example of one of Almayer's 'individual' fantasies that expresses this foundational content is the precise reference to the Dutch city of Amsterdam as being the imagined scene of his triumphant return to Europe. Conrad's description of Almayer's wish for a 'fanciful arrangement of some splendid banquet to take place on his arrival in Amsterdam' (*Almayer's* 49) is surely a re-enactment of his mother's desire for the 'lost glories of Amsterdam' (8) and further reinforces the idea of her discourse shaping his fundamental fantasy.

**The Names of the Father and symbolic law: Mr. Almayer, Hudig and Lingard**

However, a question remains. Why does Almayer stay in the settlement for so long – despite failing to realise his desire and while ever-increasing challenges range against him? Conrad reveals he ‘put off his departure from year to year, always expecting some favourable return of fortune [...] He hesitated for years’ (*Almayer’s* 24). One possible explanation is predicated upon a key precept of the Lacanian formulation of fantasy and desire. What fantasy allows the subject of desire to do is to maintain his state as desiring – not the realisation of his desire. Subsequently, ‘what the fantasy stages is not a scene in which our desire is fulfilled, fully satisfied, but on the contrary, a scene that realizes, stages, the desire as such’ (Žižek, *Awry* 6). By remaining in a state of chronic inertia for much of the novel, Almayer can perpetually retain his desire and is in no danger of losing its support in fantasy. While this may partially account for Almayer’s stagnation, a more comprehensive explanation can be offered through a consideration of the role of Lacan’s Name of the Father. This is a central concept that underpins Lacan’s subject and—in terms of sustaining and guaranteeing the unity of the socio-symbolic order—performs an absolutely indispensable function.

The Name of the Father, or paternal metaphor, is responsible for inaugurating the subject into the symbolic order. The most crucial function the Name of the Father enacts is the installation of symbolic law into the subject. Through this action, it distances the subject from what Lacan refers to as the ‘jaws’ (*Other Side* 112) of the mother’s desire – a process that Elizabeth Grosz suggests only operates to naturalise male dominance which will be examined later in this chapter. After which, the subject is ‘enabled actively to enter the intersubjective symbolic field’ (Chiesa 107) of social reality. As Lacan states, it ‘is in the *name of the father* that we must recognize the basis of the symbolic function which, since the dawn of historical time, has identified his person with the figure of the law [italics in original]’ (*Écrits* 230). This law the paternal function installs governs the symbolic order; defining its nature and character. It is this dimension of the paternal metaphor that can embody ideological values for the subject that it guarantees. For Almayer, it is telling that all of the

figures in the text which enact this function represent the ideology of imperial capitalism. For Lacan, this role is not restricted to one individual. Rather, 'by formalising its action in the form of the paternal metaphor [Lacan] makes clear that it is not inescapably tied to either biological or de facto fathers' (Fink, *Subject* 56). More specifically, it is a structural location in the symbolic – it is 'not an actual subject but a position in the symbolic order [although] a subject may nevertheless come to occupy this position, by virtue of exercising the paternal function' (Evans 62). By being a subject position, the Name of the Father may have multiple subjects come to occupy its location over time.

Initially, the figure who occupies the position of the paternal metaphor and embodiment of the law is Almayer's father. As already explored, Mr Almayer is explicitly racist and unapologetically colonial in outlook. The first substitution of this symbolic location involves Hudig, the Dutch merchant, who replaces the father. Conrad suggests that Almayer's father '[i]s no doubt delighted' (*Almayer's* 8) to see his son employed by the trader as a sign of approval validating the substitution. Conrad's depiction of Almayer's memory of Hudig confirms him as succeeding the father. The young Dutchman perceives him as inordinately powerful, befitting the Name of the Father's place-holder. He refers to 'old Hudig – the master – [who sits] enthroned', with a cashier attending 'on the right hand of the master' (8). In Almayer's mind, the old merchant would send orders 'thundering down the warehouse' (8) as if a god. More so than Almayer's father, Hudig embodies both mercantile power and colonial capitalism in Almayer's subjectivity.

Following Hudig, Lingard becomes the 'acknowledged king' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 9) of the regional traders. He changes into 'a hero in Almayer's eyes' (10) and displaces Hudig. Again, Conrad is careful to inscribe into Almayer's perception of the arguments between Hudig and Lingard a majesty commensurate with the function they enact in his subjectivity. To the young 'Almayer's ears it sounded like a quarrel of Titans – a battle of the gods' (10), whereas, in reality, the narrator likens it more to 'two mastiffs fighting over a marrowy bone'

(10). Almayer's reaction to Lingard's discovery of the river cements this adoration, as '[t]hat was it! He had discovered a river! That was the fact placing Lingard above so many [others]'

(10). These figures who embody the paternal law in Almayer's psychic economy represent the colonial enterprise in its capitalist entrepreneurial form. This mercantile aspect saturates the paternal metaphor and defines the character of the socio-symbolic reality for the young Dutchman.

Almayer's location in the socio-symbolic order is subsequently determined by Lingard, which reflects the influence the Name of the Father exerts, as he ends up in the trading settlement due to 'Lingard and his own weak will' (21). He remains inherently racist – he felt 'uneasy' and 'disgusted' (20) at the thought of marriage to Lingard's adopted Malay daughter, and was 'greatly inclined to run away' on his wedding day, even considering possible murder by 'getting rid of the pretty Malay girl in a more or less distant future' (20). Almayer is stopped in this plan by a 'judicious fear of his father-in-law' (20) – with Conrad's highly suggestive reference to 'in-law' reinforcing Lingard's position as the paternal embodiment of the law and authority for Almayer's subjectivity. His racism is tacitly supported by Lingard, who views his adopted daughter's ethnicity as an obstacle only overcome through the wealth he will soon discover. Lingard states to Almayer that '[n]obody will see the colour of your wife's skin. The dollars are too thick for that' (11). This racist authority of Lingard resonates throughout this sequence—without protestation from Almayer—as he proceeds to take Nina away with him to be 'brought up decently' and 'taught properly' (22) with friends in Singapore. The implication here is that a native Malay upbringing results in both indecency and ignorance; the paternal function Lingard exercises does not recognise a native Malay symbolic system as equal or worthy of consideration – a subjective perspective that seamlessly resonates with Almayer's parental discourse.

It is here, in the paternal function Lingard embodies, that the reason for Almayer remaining on the Borneo coast becomes clear. Almayer not only stays on the coast, he



deliberately seeks to continue the exact same, failed pursuit of Lingard's, which is to discover the gold and jewels in the interior of the region. Almayer plans this ludicrous endeavour despite Lingard earlier returning, 'aged, ill, a ghost of his former self', and 'almost the last survivor of the numerous expedition[s]' (22). The question of why Almayer seeks to pursue what appears to be a hopeless venture can be answered through reference to the profound importance of the Name of the Father in the subject's psychic economy. Lacan asserts it is the 'circuit' of the father into which the subject is 'integrated' (Lacan, *Ego* 89). He suggests that 'my father made mistakes which I am absolutely condemned to repeat [and] I am condemned to reproduce them because I am obliged to pick up again the discourse he bequeathed to me' (89). This statement clarifies why Almayer precisely repeats the errors of Lingard. Of course, it is the desire of his mother that drives him to seek riches to return to Europe, as has been suggested. However, it is the Name of the Father that directs him to seek these riches in the same, precise manner as his failed mentor – to 'reproduce' Lingard's mistakes.

### **Failure of the Name of the Father: symbolic collapse and foreclosure**

I have demonstrated that it is the paternal function that installs and defines the law of the symbolic order, which for Almayer's subjectivity is capitalist imperialism. Yet it is clear as the narrative progresses that this socio-symbolic system of western colonialism on the Boreno coast fails. In the context of a Lacanian interpretation, it is compelling to note that this deterioration of colonial socio-symbolic reality in the text appears to coincide with the disappearance of the figures that enact the function of the Name of the Father. This correspondence is crucial, as the integrity of the symbolic order is predicated upon the existence of the Name of the Father. In Lacan's early model, the Name of the Father guarantees the coherency and unity of socio-symbolic reality and of the subject composed

within this reality<sup>5</sup>. It 'indicates that the Other [of the socio-symbolic order] is guaranteed by another transcendent Other, namely the paternal law. The Other as Law, the Other of the Other, corresponds to the Name-of-the-Father' (Chiesa 107).

All of the characters that embody this unifying function vanish from the text. Conrad does not mention Almayer's father again after the briefest of parental sketches. Later, Lingard's 'banker, Hudig of Macassar, fail[s], and with this went the whole available capital' (*Almayer's* 22) sustaining Lingard's and Almayer's venture. The most prominent embodiment of the paternal function, Lingard, fades away, as it seems 'Europe had swallowed up the Rajah Laut' (23). After this failure of his benefactor, Almayer is left in 'complete silence' (23). It is due to the existence of these colonialists that social reality coheres for Almayer, as the Name of the Father works as an 'external guarantor of the Symbolic' (Chiesa 109). Without the presence of Lingard to embody the function of the Name of the Father, the symbolic order slowly but inevitably erodes. Socio-symbolic reality endures a 'leakage of the real as senseless into the supposedly meaningful symbolic order' (Lewis 159), and its capacity to maintain meaning and order dissolves.

The socio-symbolic system of imperial capitalism—the law instituted through Lingard and others—is presented in the text, in one sense, through the physical representations of that ideology. As the final figure enacting the paternal function disappears, Conrad depicts the gradual fragmentation of these structures constituting the symbolic order around Almayer. He observes the 'ruined godowns' where a 'few broke cases of mouldering goods reminded him of the good early times' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 24). Even the construction of the building catering to the proposed expansion of the British quickly becomes a 'new ruin' (141). The 'rotten wharf of Lingard and Co' (24) is perhaps the most telling example. This embodiment of European trade—the jetty, house and offices—is rotten and collapsing. Conrad depicts this disintegration where

[h]alf-obliterated words – ‘Office: Lingard and Co’ were still legible on the duty door [and] four wooden armchairs straggled forlornly, as if ashamed of their grubby surroundings [.] The floor was uneven, with many withered plants and dried earth scattered about [.] Great red stains [were] on the floor and the walls [and] opposite a faint and sickly perfume as of decaying flowers.  
(*Almayer's* 15)

Conrad's imagery captures the disintegration of the imperial symbolic order and the increasing incapacity of the symbolic system to articulate meaning. This semantic failure is keenly evidenced in the reference to the '[h]alf-obliterated words' on the door – a glimpse of the signifier fraying and dissolving as colonial symbolic reality slowly decays. In the Lacanian model, any dissolution of the symbolic occurs with a commensurate 'invasion' (Chiesa 108) of the real. Suggestively, Conrad inscribes a recurrent image into the text that appears to conform to the effects the real exerts on the symbolic. This intrusion of the real, discernible in *Almayer's Folly*, is a highly specific figuration which differs from the form it takes in Conrad's later novels. Subsequently, it is defined by fissures and absences within socio-symbolic reality. At this early stage of Conrad's fiction, it appears as what Slavoj Žižek identifies as a 'massive, oppressive material presence' (*Sublime* 208). This 'mute embodiment of an impossible *jouissance* [is] an impassive, imaginary objectification of the real' (209). It is encoded into the '[g]reat red stains' and the 'decaying flowers' that proliferate in Almayer's home, which disfigure and corrode the physical structure embodying the colonial ideology of Lingard. While it is important to recognise the broader damage to the symbolic order, it is also necessary to identify how this disintegration affects Almayer's own subjectivity – given that it is constituted within this socio-symbolic reality of colonialism. Initially, the loss of the Name of the Father and the first intrusion of the real clearly destabilise the symbolic order. Concomitantly, it also erodes part of Almayer's fantasy space, which is the desire to become a successful colonial merchant with Lingard. The loss of this aspect of his fantasy is embodied

in the 'half-obliterated words' of 'Lingard and Co' and the general decay of the property – embodying the failure of his ambitions.

Conrad's imagery of nature as an overwhelming, disruptive force—the eruption of the real as 'massive, oppressive material presence' —is again visible later in the text. Compellingly, it signals a moment that further fragments Almayer's fantasy – that of returning to Europe with Nina. This eruption represents that which is most destabilising to Almayer's desire – the sexual union of his daughter with the Balinese prince, Dain. As Nina and Dain part after an erotic liaison, Conrad depicts

[a] shower of flamed immense red blossoms [...] all around them [as] the intense work of tropical nature went on: plants shooting upward, entwined, interlaced in inextricable confusion, climbing madly and brutally over each other in the terrible silence of a desperate struggle [...] struck with sudden horror at the seething mass of corruption below, at the death and decay from which they sprang. (Conrad, *Almayer's* 53)

What becomes striking is Conrad's consistency in his choice of diction to signal these intrusions of the real. Before, Conrad refers to the '[g]reat red stains' and 'decaying flowers' that disfigure colonial structures. Now, his imagery suggests 'flamed immense red blossoms' and a 'seething mass of corruption' (53). This reflects the collapse of another aspect of Almayer's fantasy space in the symbolic. Nina's union with Dain represents her rejection of European values and culture, as she later acknowledges how she was 'rejected with scorn by the white people' (127) during her schooling in Singapore, and proudly now sees herself as a 'Malay' (127). This declaration she makes to her father, as she later escapes with Dain, only confirms the impossibility of Almayer returning to Holland with her. The intrusion of the real articulates Nina's sexual "transgression" against a racist colonial ideology, as Dain's and Nina's love contravenes both the paternal law of Lingard and colonial ideology.

Unsurprisingly, a third eruption of the real is discernible during another moment that results in the final disintegration of Almayer's fantasy. It appears when Almayer sees what he believes is the mutilated corpse of Dain floating in the storm-waters of the river that flows through the settlement. Of course, the body is a snare. It is put there by Almayer's wife, who 'batter[s] the face of the dead [servant of Dain's] with a heavy stone', placing him in the water as a decoy, with Dain's 'ring' on the 'slave's hand' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 92) to help identify him as the Balinese prince. The deception is simply part of a scheme to deceive the Dutch authorities, who seek to arrest the 'criminal [who] deserves to hang' (89) for his involvement in a plot to smuggle gunpowder. However, Almayer is unaware of this ruse, and so immediately falls prey to it. This erroneous belief is disastrous for Almayer, as Dain is the crucial figure in his endeavour to discover the 'rich gold-mine' in the interior – Almayer 'share[s] his knowledge with Dain' (47) in order to reach the treasure. He sees the Balinese nobleman as both 'brave' and 'reckless' – to the extent that with him 'success seem[s] assured' (47). The apparent loss of Dain shatters this possibility. Subsequently, the last aspect of Almayer's fantasy disintegrates. In a manner consistent with prior eruptions, the real similarly appears as a 'massive, oppressive material' presence, signalling the dissolution of Almayer's fantasy. Again, a characteristic flash of red presages the outburst of the real, in what appears to be 'at first a strip of red cloth' (67) floating in the river. Following this image, a brute, material presence is discernible in Conrad's depiction of the 'unconscious logs [which] tossed and ground and bumped and rolled over the dead stranger with the stupid persistency of inanimate things' (67). This last disturbance of the real in the text corresponds to the final dissolution of Almayer's fantasy space – without Dain, Almayer cannot discover the untold wealth of the 'Gunong Mas – the mountain of gold' (61).

Consequently, Almayer's psyche begins to unravel. In Lacanian terms, the loss of the Name of the Father initiates the process of foreclosure, which represents the gradual disintegration of the individual subject. Foreclosure is the 'effect of the lack of the Name of

the Father' (Chiesa 108), and it is accompanied by the intrusion of the real into the subject and the advent of psychosis. Indeed, it is the 'Other of the symbolic Other [*qua* Name of the Father that] prevents the subject from being invaded by the Real. Such an invasion occurs, with disastrous consequences, in the case of psychosis' (108). Conrad offers a depiction of Almayer's mind that appears highly similar to the Lacanian process of foreclosure. Lacan remarks that at the 'heart of the psychotic relation' is 'psychosomatic phenomena', which can appear as a 'conflict' upon the subject's 'corporeal being' (*Psychoses* 313) or body. Suggestively, Conrad appears to inscribe these precise somatic phenomena of 'conflict' into his presentation of Almayer. As he dines with the Dutch naval officers who are waiting to arrest the Balinese nobleman, Almayer has the 'thought that Dain' is dead recur to him, and he immediately feels 'as if an invisible hand [is] gripping his throat' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 90). Conrad's description of this somatic affliction becomes markedly more pronounced prior to Almayer revealing what he believes is Dain's body to the men. Moments before he 'drag[s] the cover with hasty violence' off of the corpse, Conrad portrays Almayer making an 'effort to speak', and, with an 'uncertain gesture [...] seem[s] to free his throat from the grip of an invisible hand' (102). Even when asleep, one of Almayer's arms is shown to be 'thrown across the lower part of his face as if to ward off an invisible enemy' (111).

For Lacan, these somatic phenomena indicative of psychosis must be allied to a 'decomposition of internal discourse' (*Psychoses* 321), where the subject's 'world sinks into confusion' (256). This disorientating loss of individual cognisance is keenly discernible in the depiction of Almayer's mind. Conrad describes Almayer's increasingly tenuous hold on reality in his sensation of 'falling, falling, falling', into a 'smooth, round, black thing', where the 'black walls had been rushing upwards with wearisome rapidity' (*Almayer's* 72) in what appears to be an increasing intrusion of the real. His reaction to Dain's 'death' exhibits symptoms of psychotic dissociation, where the subject experiences a sensation of being separated or detached from their own being. As Lacan observes, the 'subject literally speaks with his ego,

and it's as if a third party, his lining, were speaking and commenting on his activity' (*Psychoses* 14). Conrad describes Almayer's reactions in exactly these terms. The Dutchman 'seem[s] somehow to himself to be standing on one side, a little way off, looking at a certain Almayer who was in great trouble' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 72). This Almayer is 'very anxious' to see the other 'lying dead' (72) – an unsettling image of dissociation that unambiguously reveals a wish to commit suicide.

Compellingly, the collapse of Almayer's subjective structure appears to be most clearly encoded into Conrad's figuration of Almayer's dream. As he sleeps, Almayer sees that 'the heavens had descended upon him like a heavy mantle', and that faces are 'pressed around him till he gasped for breath under the crushing weight of worlds that hung over his aching shoulders' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 112). When considered from a Lacanian perspective, this description suggests the effect of the loss of the Name of the Father. In the absence of the structural keystone that maintains the subject's integrity in the symbolic order, the symbolic order obviously disintegrates for the individual. This disintegration seems evident in the image of the 'crushing weight of worlds' that press upon Almayer. In his dream, if 'he attempt[s] to move he would step off into nothing, and perish in the crashing fall of that universe of which he was the only support' (112). Almayer is the 'only support' – the sole representative of capitalist ideology in Borneo, after the loss of the figures that enacted the paternal function. As he relates to the Dutch naval officers, he is 'the only white man on the east coast that is a settled resident' (87), and therefore he must bear the 'crashing fall' of that symbolic 'universe', as it fragments around him in the absence of the Name of the Father.

Of course, when Almayer experiences Nina's "desertion" of him as she escapes with Dain, his descent into absolute psychosis is complete. He becomes prey to the full range of psychotic symptoms, most visible in the form of 'spoken hallucinatory phenomenon' (Lacan, *Psychoses* 256). His desperate attempt to 'erase[...] carefully with his hand all traces of Nina's footsteps' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 137) upon the beach in order to try and forget his daughter is

futile. In Lacanian thought, what is 'foreclosed from the symbolic is not purely and simply abolished' (Grigg 10). It merely 'returns from outside the subject, as emanating from the real' (10). Accordingly, Almayer experiences these 'auditory verbal hallucinations' (Lacan, *Psychoses* 293) in the return of the real as Nina's voice. While he is 'thinking mournfully', he is shown to hear 'distinctly the clear voice of a child speaking amongst all this wreck, ruin and waste' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 140) of his decaying buildings. Conrad depicts Almayer regularly seeing the 'small figure of a little maiden with a pretty olive face' (141) amid its ruins. These hallucinations are accompanied by his servant, Ali, witnessing his master speak to the 'child at times tenderly, then [...] weep over it, laugh at it, scold it, beg of it to go away [and] curse it' (141) in a full expression of psychotic collapse. It is only through the continued use of opium that Almayer is eventually 'permitted to forget' (145) his daughter, before being 'delivered of the trammels' (145) of his mistakes and dying alone in the ruins of the rotting structure named 'Almayer's Folly' (29).

### **Implications of the subject of desire**

This section of my first chapter has been focused upon demonstrating how Conrad appears to be writing in agreement with the foundational categories of Lacanian thought. These components comprise the structure of Lacan's subject of desire – the most conventional organisation of the subject in the Lacanian model. Given the constitution of this subject within such confines as the desire of the Other, the Name of the Father and the fundamental fantasy, questions regarding the extent of the subject's agency and freedom become pronounced. As the subject of Almayer appears determined within the discourse of his parents and the broader socio-symbolic order, his potential space for enacting any form of autonomy appears profoundly limited. This question of agency in Conrad's fiction will be explored through a Lacanian analysis of *Lord Jim*, where Conrad seems to outline a



configuration of subjectivity that may offer the potential for individual freedom.

However, the analysis of Almayer as a subject of desire does not exhaust all of the elements of the conventional Lacanian subject that are present in *Almayer's Folly*. In fact, an equally pressing structure of the subject must first be acknowledged and considered, before other subjective possibilities are examined in Conrad's later work. This aspect is another standard category of Lacanian theory that can be identified and analysed in Conrad's fiction, and one where questions of autonomy are equally prominent. It is perhaps the most contentious figuration of subjectivity in both Conrad's and Lacan's writing – the structure of the female subject.

### **The fantasy of Nina in *Almayer's Folly***

Lacan's formula of sexuation is a fundamental category of his psychoanalysis, and one that appears discernible within Conrad's figuration of female characters in *Almayer's Folly* – most notably in the case of Nina. Indeed, as I will demonstrate in this analysis, a striking and problematic affinity exists between Lacan's structuration of the female subject and Conrad's aesthetic of his female characters in his early fiction. It is an unsettling correspondence that foregrounds a series of apparent limitations regarding the representation of—and potential autonomy available to—the female subject in their writing. Unsurprisingly, Conrad's portrayal of women is an area of his work that is fraught with critical debate – an observation that is equally attributable to Lacan. At first glance, it is a limited portrait that some critics starkly dismiss as an articulation of a 'blatant and uncomplicated misogyny' (Jones 7) originating from Conrad's supposed, deep-seated 'hatred and fear of women' (Karl 267).

Alternatively, revisionist critics—such as Jeremy Hawthorn—argue that Conrad 'subtly criticize[s] patriarchal ideology by exposing its insidious effect on women' (Hayes 98). Peter Hayes suggests that 'Conrad has been given insufficient credit for his depictions of

powerful women acting against the men who would control them' (98) – a comment seemingly applicable to Nina in her rejection of Almayer's attempt to return to Europe with her. Similarly, Priscilla L. Walton lauds Nina as a character who represents 'a way out of the ideological impasse' (99) existing between the Malayan character of Nina's mother and the colonialist Almayer. In Walton's reading, Nina becomes an emancipatory figure. She 'reads the texts of the past in the figures of her parents and [...] creates a different text' (99) in a practice which clearly intimates a subjective autonomy. Moreover, one important implication of this procedure of writing a new text is that it 'point[s] to an epistemological process that breaks down imperialist structures' (100). Evidently, from a certain perspective this argument may be tenable. Nina helps facilitate Dain's escape from the Dutch and she incorporates the indigenous aspects of her mother's culture into her subjectivity. Further, Nina explicitly negates Almayer's attempt to arrogate her identity during the novel's denouement, and, superficially at least, appears to assert a new identity as an act of her own will. However, while Walton sees her enacting a viable form of cultural identity beyond the attempted hegemony of imperialism, Nina must also be considered on the level of sexual identity. This is the level where any optimism regarding Conrad's depiction of Nina is negated through an elucidation of its similarities with Lacan's model of the female subject.

To support this idea it is necessary to analyse Conrad's figuration of Nina in terms of Lacan's theory of the phallus, the phallic function and their interrelationship with and determination of male and female psychical structures. Unlike in Freud's usage of the term as strictly a 'synonym of penis' (Evans 140), the phallus represents an integral psychoanalytic concept in the basic Lacanian framework. It is one that is universal to the development of the subject. Initially, the phallus is the 'signifier of the Other's desire' (Lacan, *Écrits* 583). In this context, it is the 'signifier [that] comes to signify that part of the parent's desire that goes beyond the child' (Fink, *Subject* 101) and which the child seeks to become. As such, the phallus represents that 'which is worthy of desire' (101) for the subject. As well as being a

‘signifier of desire’ (Lacan, *Écrits* 523), the phallic function is coextensively also ‘*the function that institutes lack*, that is, the alienating function of language [italics in original]’ (Fink, *Subject* 103) itself. Accordingly, all individuals are subject to this process. As Lacan states, the ‘function of the phallus [is] the pivotal point’ (Lacan, *Écrits* 463) through which the male and the female are defined in their radical dissymmetry as psychical structures. In Lacanian terms, the male/female structure is unconnected to the biological male/female bodies themselves.

The phallic function fully determines the male structure. For Lacan, it is ‘through the phallic function that man as whole acquires his inscription’ (*Encore* 79) in symbolic reality. As Fink observes, the ‘phallic function refers to the alienation brought about by language [and men] are completely determined by the phallic function’ (*Subject* 106). Therefore, in the Lacanian context, the male structure is ‘limited’ (Lacan, *Encore* 79) or has a perimeter, as ‘man can be seen as bounded or finite with respect to the symbolic register’ (Fink, *Subject* 106). Consequently, the subjectivity of the male should be fully available for representation within the socio-symbolic order as ‘every bit of him falls under the sway of the signifier’ (109). Suggestively, the subjectivity of Almayer himself is delineated in an entirety that is in stark contrast to Conrad’s initial presentation of Nina or indeed any female character. The first encounter with Nina is worth quoting in length to substantiate this assertion:

Nina stood by the table, one hand lightly resting on its edge, the other hanging listlessly by her side. Her face turned to the outer darkness, through which her dreamy eyes seemed to see some entrancing picture [. Her eyes] looked gravely, wide open and steady, as if facing something invisible to all other eyes, while she stood there all in white, straight, flexible, graceful, unconscious of herself, her low but broad forehead crowned with a shining mass of long black hair. (Conrad, *Almayer’s* 16)

Embedded within this passage are multiple elements that are present in the Lacanian structure of the female subject. Firstly, the association of her face with an 'outer darkness' suggests a void-like expanse to which she is joined. This association is augmented by the phrase describing her arm 'hanging listlessly' – intimating a subjective absence. This void-like 'outer darkness' continues through her 'dreamy eyes' that seem to see 'something invisible to all other eyes'. There is the sense of something inescapably absent in this depiction of Nina within the socio-symbolic reality. It appears to be the absence of something that cannot be positively represented within the textual fabric itself (this sense of expansive space is consistently associated with Nina, as when Dain later 'breath[es] out the name of Nina before him into the apparently limitless space' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 51)).

This problematic absence appears highly similar to Lacan's notion of feminine structure in which the woman is not fully subjected to the phallic function. As Lacan states, 'when any speaking being whatsoever situates itself under the banner "'women'", it is on the basis of the following – that it grounds itself as being not-whole in situating itself in the phallic function' (*Encore* 72). In the Lacanian model the woman 'is not altogether subject to the symbolic order', and so 'is not whole, bound or limited' (Fink, *Subject* 107) in the representation of their subjectivity. As the female is only partially determined through the phallic function, could it be that Conrad's suggestion of a subjective absence in Nina articulates this structural feature of Lacan's model? The image of Nina gazing upon an 'entrancing picture' of something 'invisible to all other eyes' also insinuates the notion of the female as being able to access an experience beyond socio-symbolic reality. This strongly accords with Lacan's concept of feminine *jouissance* – an experience only available to the female and which is outside of the symbolic order. While only part of the female subject is enacted within the phallic function, there is 'something more' (Lacan, *Encore* 74) available to her. This 'something more' is what Lacan identifies as a 'jouissance beyond the phallus' (74) –

a 'supplementary jouissance compared to what the phallic function designates by way of jouissance' (73).

Lacan aligns this 'jouissance that is beyond' with the experience of the female 'mystic' (76). It is a jouissance that is 'not too distant from the "'enigmatic mysticism"' [...] of the sylph, sphinx, or sibyl', which is 'inaccessible to the "'human community,"' [who] approaches this oracle at its own risk' (Shephardson 79). Strikingly, this sense of social separation and of a communal distancing from an esoteric feminine presence is pervasive in Conrad's figuring of Nina and her mother. The 'enigmatic' and 'inaccessible' quality of Lacan's mystic is especially pertinent to Mrs Almayer. She is generally regarded as a 'witch' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 78) and is deliberately avoided by the villagers – especially Mahmat who accuses her of 'witchcraft' (70) during the sequence involving the faked death of Dain. Even Almayer sees her as having a 'witch-like appearance' which 'disturb[s] his happiness' (27). This aspect of female mysticism might be dismissed if it only appeared around Mrs Almayer. What makes it more compelling is that Conrad describes Nina in similar terms. She is considered a 'silent figure' and a 'being from another world and incomprehensible' (30) to the village's inhabitants. In Nina's case, one cannot ascribe these qualities to an otherness attributable to her mixed ethnicity as Babalatchi, who is canny and intelligent, also deems her an 'incomprehensible creature' (95).

Conrad's inscription of these female characteristics which disturb or upset the local community are typical of the effects of feminine *jouissance* in Lacanian terms. As Suzanne Barnard observes, the 'symbolic is not indifferent to this being but is affected by it – troubled, unsettled by its strangeness' ("Tongues" 21). Of course, one immediately discernible problem with the concept of feminine jouissance is that it is inherently non-representable. As Elizabeth Grosz perceives, Lacan's concept can only remain 'unknowable' (139) for the female. By defining it as such, Lacan 'repositions women in a dependent position [as these are] experiences about which nothing more can be said than that they are *non-phallic*' (139)

and therefore bound to remain outside of any cognisant discourse. Further, Grosz identifies this partially present subjectivity of women as a 'formulation of woman as *not-all* [that] is Lacan's way of simultaneously including and excluding women' (138). It is a 'negative definition' that simply allows the space of the female to be inhabited by the male's 'myths and phantasies' (138) about the female.

Grosz's comment that the space of the female is populated by the male's fantasies is particularly apt. Alongside these aspects of Lacan's female subject that appear within Conrad's figuring of Nina, there is also an uncanny linguistic texturing strongly indicative of Lacan's matheme of fantasy ( $\$ \leftrightarrow a$ ) – a key Lacanian element in the male's relation to the female. This matheme represents the barred male subject,  $\$$ , in relation to the object cause of desire,  $a$ . The language Conrad uses to constitute Nina is of the same register that delineates the fantasy scene within Almayer's consciousness at the start of the novel. Here, Conrad inscribes Nina with a 'broad forehead crowned with a shining mass of long black hair'. She is described as being 'white' and 'straight'. Within the earlier extended fantasy sequence, Almayer envisages with tortuous yearning the 'musical chink of the broad silver pieces streaming' through the 'long and straight' offices where Hudig sits 'enthroned' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 8). The similarity of the textual fabric in both instances is deeply suggestive. It is as if Conrad's figuring of the female subject can only be articulated through the language of the male subject's fantasy, as per Lacan's formula of sexuation where there can be no direct representation of this female subject in regards to the male.

The female can only be perceived through the language of male fantasy and his *objet petit a*, which in this case is inflected with nuances of materialism and the object-like quality of the silver Almayer hopes to find – suggested by 'broad', 'straight', 'crowning' and 'shining'. Nina is textually situated as the object of desire of the male. What is particularly arresting is that Nina's depiction is not from the point of view of a character, as it is focalised from the point of view of the novel's narrator – previously this language was from the point of view of

Almayer's subjectivity. This textual similarity is unsurprising, as Lacan asserts that the male subject 'never deals with anything' in terms of the female subject but 'object *a*' (*Encore* 80). The male is 'unable to attain' a woman except as the 'cause of his desire [which] is nothing other than fantasy' (80). As such, the female subject is always mediated via the fantasy space of the male, and a 'woman can only ever enter the psychic economy of men as a fantasy object (*a*), the cause of their desire' (Evans 221) – the narrative can only approach Nina via a male character's fantasy. The question of whether Conrad is consciously demonstrating a marked Lacanian awareness of the female subject—and of Lacan's model more broadly—, or, instead, unknowingly displaying one is also pertinent to contemplate at this moment. Certainly, it is conceivable to suggest that Conrad might, at times, be presciently intuiting the rudiments of Lacanian subjectivity and inscribing them into the text – for example, in this episode involving the red curtain. However, the adjacent consideration as to the limits of his artistic imagination also surface, and the possible level of authorial control over the text itself. I would, at this juncture, refer to the concept I outline in the introduction of unconscious intentionality as an animating psychic agency which, in turn, also conjures an enlarged conception of the author beyond that of the conscious self.

Dain's first sight of Nina appears to reflect Lacan's 'somewhat ethereal vision of femininity' (Luepnitz 230) and that the female subject is only partially present in the socio-symbolic order. Conrad depicts 'Dain Maroola [as] dazzled by the unexpected vision' (*Almayer's* 43) of the young woman, and at the novel's ending Almayer too gazes at his daughter's departure and ruminates on her 'dazzling, white figure' (136). Further, these otherworldly qualities inscribed into Nina recall Lacan's famous declaration of the 'non-existence of the sexual relationship' (*Encore* 114) between the male and the female, due to the radical dissymmetry inherent in their determination through the phallus. Conrad depicts numerous moments that are symptomatic of this structural disjuncture. One such moment is when Dain appreciates the imponderable distance that separates him from Nina as Almayer

assists in their escape from the Dutch. Dain feels 'something invisible that [stands] between them [and that nothing] could destroy this vague feeling of their difference' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 132). Their capacity for mutual understanding is also rendered problematic. During an embrace in the jungle, Conrad reveals that no 'two beings could be closer to each other', but that Nina guesses 'rather than underst[ands] the meaning' (123) of Dain's words. In a similar manner, Dain personifies the sea as a female entity and then explains how he cannot fathom the 'hidden meaning' (123) that she contains. In Lacanian terms, the prospect of this disjunction being overcome remains impossible.

### **Conrad, Lacan and the problem of the phallus**

The function of the phallus in the Lacanian model is integral for both sexes. As has been demonstrated, it is a highly problematic component – given that it appears to preclude a comprehensive representation of the female subject. Not only does the presence of the phallic function seem discernible in Conrad's prose, it also can be seen to offer the same reductive and partial form of female subjectivity which is most evident in the figure of Nina. Considering that Lacan's female subject is enacted through the signifier of the phallus, it is of little surprise that his claim that the phallus is merely a neutral symbolic term is strongly contested. This claim must be closely scrutinised. As shown, the figures of Conrad's female characters are delineated in terms of masculine fantasy and a partial subjectivity. This identification lends credibility to Elizabeth Grosz's assertion that 'the phallic signifier is not a neutral third term against which both sexes are analogously or symmetrically positioned [...]'. [T]he relation between the penis and phallus is not arbitrary but politically and socially motivated' (124) to maintain the existing order of patriarchal dominance. What Grosz asserts is that rather than being an empty term, the phallus is indissolubly linked with the male sexual organ and as such is supportive of patriarchy. It is only through the phallus that a



position in the symbolic order be attained. Grosz argues that the penis becomes 'removed from its merely anatomical and functional role' and becomes an object of desire within the 'circuit of demand addressed to the (m)other' (116). It is here that the phallus becomes a 'valorised signifier' (116) linked to the penis. With this linkage and by 'means of the desire of the other, the male comes to be affirmed as possessing or *having* the phallus [italics in original]' (119). Given that the penis/phallus is 'held' by the male, it is then understandable how the phallus 'function[s] as the signifier of the presence and absence of access to power and self-definition' (121) and consequently controls the definition of the female subject.

This is a challenging aspect of Lacan's elementary model of female subjectivity, and, by extension, Conrad's depiction of women, as it is discernible within *Almayer's Folly*. It is at this juncture that the position of the phallus in the novel must be located and the 'holder' of the phallus identified – Conrad's rich, lustrous, initial description of Dain and his introduction to Nina appears to crystallize these foundational Lacanian elements. Conrad shows a light that 'br[eaks] in a thousand sparkling rays on the jewelled hilt of his kriss protruding from under the many folds of his red sarong gathered into a sash round his waist', and, accompanying this magnificent image, Nina sees 'an erect lithe figure of medium height with a breadth of shoulder suggesting great power' (*Almayer's* 42). Moments later, she envisages Dain 'standing erect' (43) on his boat as he departs the settlement. Andrew Michael Roberts notes that the 'insistent allusions to the sword suggest [...] a need to reassert the phallic' (*Masculinity* 35). This observation can be taken further to assert that here is a textual intersection between the penis—euphemistically encoded into the sword and the repeated insistence of 'erect'—and the phallus *qua* 'access to the social categories invested with various power relations' (Grosz 121) as Dain embodies both Balinese royalty and great material wealth. Conrad's description of Dain is inflected with materialist riches hinted at by the 'sparkling rays' of his 'jewelled hilt', the 'gold embroidery of his black silk jacket' and the 'precious stones' on his many rings – all reminiscent of the language used to describe Nina.

Given the similarity in the linguistic tone between both characters the distinction between 'having' the phallus and 'being' the phallus can now be drawn. Dain 'has' the phallus *qua* his virility and physical strength in the narrative (his skill and prowess as a lover for Nina, easily disarming Almayer of his gun, swimming through the storm waters, etc) and his socio-symbolic position as a prince with his great material wealth. However, Nina 'is' the phallus within the text – an object of desire for both Dain and Almayer and one that is depicted in language redolent of precious jewels and metals, as will be explained in a moment. Dain's position as 'having' the phallus is comically reflected when both Mrs Almayer and Nina vie to gain the better view of him through the rent in the red curtain, as a display of the female deferring to the presence of the phallus encoded into Dain.

From a Lacanian perspective, the red curtain in Almayer's house has a certain significance in terms of the subjective disjunction between the male and female and the position of the phallus. The curtain structurally demarcates the barrier between the feminine and the masculine in the text as it is introduced where Almayer's wall is 'cut in two by the doorway of a central passage closed by a red curtain. The women's room opened into that passage' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 15). It is from behind the curtain that Nina first appears 'suggesting access into the unknown' (J. Turner 234), which recalls the supposed mysticism of a feminine jouissance beyond phallic representation. However, when the reader sees behind this curtain the only revelation is of two females fighting to gain a view of the holder of the phallus – a scene supporting the primacy of phallic power in Grosz's terms. The image of the red curtain recurs throughout the text as a boundary between the genders and an interesting moment occurs as the slave girl, Taminah, seeks to awaken Almayer and alert him to Nina's flight with Dain. Conrad's manner of revelation plays upon the spatial demarcation the curtain enacts, as well as touching on the configuration of the female within the male's fantasy space and the language of the object cause of desire. Taminah states that '[t]he place behind the curtain is empty' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 114). On the literal level, this is obvious and

true – Nina is fleeing with the prince. It is on the level of Lacan's matheme of fantasy and the male subject that Taminah reveals a greater, unheeded truth to Almayer. In Lacanian terms, the place behind the curtain as limit was always empty, always devoid of anything except Almayer's own fantasies of his daughter. As Žižek explains, the 'female is the structure of the limit as such, a limit that precedes what may or may not lie in its beyond; all that we perceive in this beyond [...] are our own fantasy projections' ("Weininger" 140). As Conrad harrowingly reveals to Almayer as he tracks the lovers down, Nina can never fulfil his misguided, fantastical designs for her future.

Perhaps the most important attribute of the phallus is that it functions as the 'pivot' (Lacan, *Écrits* 463) enabling the subjective definition of the female subject, and is the means of access to power relations and symbolic positioning. For Grosz's criticisms to gain further traction, the phallus must be located as performing these two functions in the text for the benefit of a male character. Indeed, these very actions can be detected in Dain's and Nina's relationship. It is here that we can refer back to Walton's contention that Nina is a character who reflects a movement towards subjective autonomy. This autonomy is supposedly articulated in her accusations toward Almayer as she and Dain depart to Bali, the kingdom of Dain's father, the Rajah. She rejects her father's designs for her, accusing Almayer that he 'want[s] [her] to dream [his] dreams, to see [his] visions' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 126). While she appears to obviate the strictures of a Eurocentric imperialist ideology and subjectify a Malayan cultural heritage, on the level of sexual identity she merely exchanges one form of patriarchy for another. Crucially, the manner of her repositioning within socio-symbolic reality is solely enabled through the agency of the phallus.

Her symbolic repositioning originates from Dain. During the course of her romance, Conrad illustrates her acquiescence to Dain's courtship in terms suggestive of the acquisition of a symbolic knowledge that he alone possesses, as Nina 'th[inks] she could read in his eyes the answer to all the questionings of her heart' and understands 'the reason and aim of life'

(108). On one level this might reflect a typical romance, yet in a Lacanian reading it resonates with a process of 'reading' in the context of the symbolic order *qua* language and a process only accessed through the phallus. Nina 'reads' the answers in Dain, she discovers a 'reason' and 'aim' for existence and he is the 'road to freedom' (108) for her. Dain is the custodian of this knowledge – the holder of the phallus and guarantor of her subjectivity. Rather than Walton's escape from an 'ideological impasse', Nina becomes subsumed within a patriarchal socio-symbolic system. Indeed, when she is tempted to reveal her plan to her father, she internally hears 'with terror the voice of her overpowering love to be silent' (74), reflecting the authority which Dain holds over her. This elevated subjective position that Dain enjoys is commensurate with the 'holder' of the phallus – he exerts a decisive power over her and is the man Nina can only think of as the 'master of life' (121).

Lending further credibility to Grosz's claims, Nina is presented as an unconscious support of this system. As she lauds Dain to her father, she tellingly declares that Dain's 'name shall be remembered long after both our bodies are laid in the dust' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 127). Nina's own subjectivity is shown to be ephemeral and secondary to Dain's, clearly reflecting her negligible value in the broader symbolic order. This reference to the signifier of his name enduring within socio-symbolic reality ensures the replication and continuance of the system of patriarchy that operates within the text. As Grosz states, the Lacanian phallus enacts the function of 'naturalising male dominance' (123). Due to this function, it 'is motivated by the already existing structure of patriarchal power, and its effects guarantee the reproduction of this particular form of social organisation' (124). This 'reproduction' of male power is similarly present in *Almayer's Folly*. After the couple's flight, Babalatchi mentions at the end of the novel that a 'grandson has been born to the old Rajah, and there is great rejoicing' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 144). The character of Nina is not mentioned. The socio-symbolic order reflects the elevation of the male and holder of the phallus *qua* social power in the form of the Rajah. His name will be continued, unlike Nina's, whose name

disappears within the symbolic structures of Balinese society, absorbed into that of Dain's royal house.

A further, disturbing structural affinity can be drawn between the interrelationship of the female subject and the male psyche in the basic Lacanian model. It is present within Conrad's depiction of Almayer's and Dain's contemplation of Nina and the narcissistic function she enables within their consciousnesses. Located within the register of the imaginary, the ego is, according to Lacan, an 'object' in the 'libidinal economy' (*Ego* 96) and thus harbours an erotic dimension. The ego can be linked to 'the narcissistic stage of development' (Evans 120) in the subject. This 'narcissistic relation constitutes the imaginary dimension of human relations' (120), so that narcissism is inherent within inter-subjective relations in the imaginary order. Grosz identifies this strand in the Freudian and Lacanian models of romantic love, where she observes that 'anaclitic' (126) love directed from the male to the female has a fundamentally narcissistic structure. She argues that the male subject 'displaces his [...] narcissism onto an extraneous love object, and, by projecting her as an extension of himself, is able to receive his narcissistic investment back' (127).

Conrad sketches two moments in *Almayer's Folly* that bear a striking structural resemblance to this organisation of the male subject's narcissistic interaction with the female. Examining these two passages side by side is worthwhile. In one episode, Conrad intersects Dain's feelings for Nina with a clear sense of self-love: '[n]ow he wanted but immortality, he thought, to be the equal of gods, and the creature that could open so the gates of paradise must be his – soon would be his forever' (*Almayer's* 54). Compare this to Almayer's fantasy of his return to Europe having achieved great wealth and glory: '[w]itnessing her triumphs he would grow young again, he would forget the heart-breaking struggle' (7). In both moments, Conrad depicts the imago of the female being utilised as a mechanism enabling a renewal of the male; a process where the female is merely a reflexive conduit of the libidinal energy of the male. What also may be identified is that this implies a

sensation evocative of incest on Almayer's part. This feeling has been accurately identified by Jennifer Turner in Conrad's portrayals of father-daughter relations where the 'need for the daughter's physical presence [...] hints at an almost incestuous desire for possession' (230).

### **Exchanging subjectivity: Conrad, Lacan and Lévi-Strauss**

At this juncture, multiple strands have emerged that suggest an affinity between Lacan's and Conrad's figuration of the female subject. The most discernible of these include the partial subjective presence of the female subject within the symbolic, the constitutive material of the female hewn from the language of male fantasy, the male as the holder of the phallus and therefore determinate of female identity and the narcissistic function which the female is ascribed to fulfilling for the male. What must also be demonstrated is the extent to which the character of Nina functions as 'being' the phallus in the text – the object of desire within a male-dominated network of exchange. Lacan's conception of the female subject builds on the ideas of Claude Lévi-Strauss that suggest the woman is an object of exchange within kinship groups<sup>6</sup>. As Lacan states, 'whether they like it or not, women in reality [*reel*] serve as objects for exchanges ordained by the elementary structures of kinship' (*Écrits* 471). In the Lacanian model, this structural positioning of the female is an inevitable 'social fate that ordains that [women] take the place of the object of exchange' (Zafiropoulos 102) in the socio-symbolic order and that this process is governed by the male subject.

Speaking of Freud's famous analysis of Dora, Lacan argues that 'the problem of her condition is that of fundamentally accepting herself as a man's object of desire' (*Écrits* 181). Nina, of course, unquestionably accepts this condition and facilitates it. Clearly, Nina is desired by both Dain and Almayer and throughout the text this dynamic is obvious. Interestingly, it is articulated in terms of an unlawful exchange of an object by Almayer to Dain during the final confrontation between the two men, indicated in his accusation of

'[y]ou thief!' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 125). Viewed from one angle, Almayer would never sanction the union due to the racism inherent in the European Imperialist ideology which determines his perspective. However, viewed from another angle, one could speculate that the label of 'thief' articulates a deeper implication where the symbolic law of exchange was not upheld by Dain – perhaps in his unfulfilled pledge to journey to Lingard's mountain of gold. Certainly, Nina is reduced to an object in this exchange as Dain moments later declares that 'this woman belongs to me' (127).

Abdulla, the wealthy Arab merchant, actually adheres to this logic of exchange earlier in the text. In this 'proposed transaction' (Juhász 12), he offers Almayer the sum of 'three thousand dollars' as the 'price of the girl' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 36) for marriage to his nephew, Reshid, newly returned from Mecca. Of course, Abdulla looks 'straight past Almayer at the red curtain [...] where a slight tremor disclosed the presence of women on the other side' (35) which suggests he also perceives Nina as 'being' the object of desire or phallus in the textual network of the novel. While the notion of the female 'being' the phallus might initially seem counter-intuitive, it simply means the woman occupies the place of the male's desire. As such, the female subject cannot be the 'holder' of the phallus. She only ever can be the object of desire which is then exchanged by the male in the symbolic network of ownership. This idea of Nina 'being' the object of desire *qua* phallus is amplified by the reactions of the Dutch officers, who also desire to 'catch a glimpse of [Almayer's] daughter' (29) when they decide to visit his compound.

### **The son of heaven: the position of gold and god in *Almayer's Folly***

Susan Jones, when writing of the difficulties critics encounter when dealing with Conrad's characterisation of women, draws passing attention to an observation of Edward Said. Said suggests that Conrad uses 'substances around which a great deal of the narrative

action is organised: Lingard's gold, Kurtz's ivory, the ships of sailors, Gould's silver, the women that draw men to chance and romance' (qtd. in Jones 106). Jones accurately reads this strictly in terms of women as subject to the process of commoditisation. However, this idea of commoditisation can be extended as there is a broader capitalist market of exchange detectable in *Almayer's Folly* in regards to the subject. Taken even further—given that Conrad's depiction of Dain is also inscribed with precious metals and jewels—I do not believe that this commoditisation of the subject is ascribable to the female alone. The language of commoditisation actually colours both genders. It is just that the female subject is inevitably situated within this patriarchal textual matrix on a lower value level within the social symbolic system in comparison to the male subject. This symbiosis of both the subjective dimension of Conrad's writing and the dimension of the commodity may be elucidated through the work of Jean-Joseph Goux. Goux's work posits a homology between the subject, the commodity and language and introduces the concept of the 'general equivalent' as a device organising the composition of the socio-symbolic order.

Using a Marxist-Lacanian framework, Goux argues that the concept of the general equivalent originates from within the formation of the monetary system and enables the logic of exchange to operate. In Goux's model, 'what is in the beginning simply one commodity among many is placed in an exclusive position, set apart to serve as a unique measure of the values of all other commodities' (3) – a general equivalent. Goux sees this exclusion from the structure of exchange as what essentially guarantees the function of that system and the value of the elements circulating within it. In the register of money, for example, it is gold that becomes the excluded, necessarily absent element from the space of circulation. Here we could notionally identify the aforementioned gold of Lingard as somewhat fulfilling this function in the novel of guaranteeing a level of exchange. The novel appears predicated upon the premise of capitalist exchange in its most entrepreneurial form: Almayer, Hudig, Lingard, Abdulla and Dain all operate through the auspices of exchange



within a market and the trade of gunpowder and sundry other commodities connect these characters.

Building upon this analysis, Goux identifies a correspondence between the register of subjects, objects and products. In this correspondence, 'the *Father* becomes the general equivalent of subjects [and] the *Phallus* the general equivalent of objects, in a way that is structurally and genetically homologous to the accession of a unique element (let us say *Gold*[...]) to the rank of the general equivalent of products [*italics in original*]' (4). What becomes pertinent for an interpretation of Conrad is that Goux conflates the structural operation of these three registers to help explain the subject's location within the symbolic. He conflates objects, products and subjects when tracing the emergence of the subject. For Goux, in the same way the subject in human commerce 'gradually reflects his value (his soul) in the body of numerous similar beings, so the total (or extended) value form brings the commodity' (15) into what Marx designates as a 'social relation, not simply with one other commodity of a different kind, but with the world of commodities in general' (qtd. in Goux 15). This conflation of registers that underpins a key aspect of Goux's notion of subjectivity may also elucidate the aesthetic intertwining of the commodity—material wealth—with the subject in *Almayer's Folly*.

The value and contours of the subject are determined by the commodity at the top of the hierarchy that is excluded to enable the social space to function. Goux states that a 'hierarchy is instituted between an excluded, idealised element and the other elements, which measure their value in it' (4). In this case gold – the precious metal, the language of gold, silver and jewels that figure in the appearance of Dain as 'holder' of the phallus and Nina as 'being' the phallus. Indeed, as Goux says of the commodity, something which is also structurally equivalent for the subject, that 'a commodity, as a value, struggles with a series of specular relationships and identifications that link it [finally] to an absolute commodity (gold), in which the contradictions of its own value are resolved' (17). Goux, in his own

analysis, defers to and relies upon Marx's metaphor of gold as the 'Lord of commodities [which] suffices to convince us of the profoundly theological character of the monetary system' (18). It is in light of this theoretical moment that the situation of Dain, Almayer and Nina can also be 'resolved' in terms of this narrative of 'value'.

The reference to Dain as a 'Son of Heaven' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 50), made by Mrs Almayer as she gleefully plays with her dowry of precious metal, offers a glimpse into a thread of theological imagery textured by Conrad throughout the novel. This thread starts from the early image of Hudig and Lingard as gods to the recurring references to glory, heaven and enthronement which permeate the text. This theological imagery is, of course, indelibly bound up with the figurations of materialism and capitalism that are interlaced into Conrad's depiction of Dain and Nina as they occupy spaces of great "value" in the socio-symbolic order. A crucial distinction can be drawn here between these two characters and Conrad's presentation of Almayer. This theological-economic register is not imbricated into the subjectivity of Almayer, as he occupies a symbolic space of little "value" according to that textual guarantee of ultimate value, gold. His individual perception is certainly nuanced through a strain of language that hints at his desire for gold – he observes the 'glowing gold tinge on the waters' (7) and sees 'the surface of the sea with a great bar of gold laid on it' by the moon (12). Tellingly, these motifs of value are never incorporated into the actual constitution of his subjectivity as delineated by the novel's narrator. Almayer longs for gold but never has it. Characters seemingly enjoy gradations of this linguistic richness that vary in regards to their relationship with the material guarantor of value, gold, as well as other precious metals. Even Mrs Almayer's appearance modulates according to this imperative. As she handles the dowry, 'the music of tinkling silver' seems to 'delight her and her eyes sparkle' with its 'reflected gleam' (50).

Returning to Dain, this usage of 'heaven' in 'Son of Heaven' could be literally interpreted as Dain's father, the Rajah. In reference to Goux's system, the Rajah is textually

absent from the novel but functions both as the supplier of Dain's wealth (given to Mrs Almayer as a dowry for her daughter enabling Nina's exchange) and as the figure of the 'Father' that guarantees the value and position of the subject in the symbolic structure of exchange. Goux sees the ultimate resolution of symbolic relations in the figure of God who is synchronous with the material of gold: 'substitute the element *subject* for the Marxian element *commodity*, in order to see the genetic unfolding of the relations with the [other] and the resolution of these relations in the figure of God the Father [*italics in original*]' (19). Dain as this 'Son of Heaven' is resolved via this arbiter into the position of the highest subjective value in the market economy of the symbolic order in *Almayer's Folly*. As such, Almayer may yearn for his glorious return to Europe amid wealth and splendour, but it is Dain as the 'Son of Heaven' that ironically enables Nina to vindicate her father's desire for her to live in ostentatious grandeur as she becomes a princess of the Rajah's dynasty. This also explains and lends the bitterest irony to the name the opium smoking Jim-Eng bestows upon the trading house Almayer builds. Designated by the Dutch 'Almayer's Folly', Jim-Eng deems it the 'House of heavenly delight' (Conrad, *Almayer's* 144). We have here the ironic inverse of all Dain pertains to in the text. The structure built for the purpose of housing Lingard's gold remains empty, and only fulfils the function of mausoleum for the titular character who ultimately entertains the lowest symbolic value in the text.

### **Conclusion: a reduced and restricted subjectivity?**

It seems incontestable to suggest that if Lacan's structure of women is discernible in Conrad's early writing, it is a reductive and partial representation of female subjectivity. Appearing to occupy a lower value in socio-symbolic reality, Conrad's initial depictions of the female subject seem to be enacted through the phallic function as per Lacan's model. This is a function that Elizabeth Grosz convincingly elucidates as one that is fully subordinated to the

male subject. Further, the phallic function at work in *Almayer's Folly* is not only incontrovertibly focused upon reproducing the dominant system of patriarchy which exists in socio-symbolic reality, it also precludes the representation of the female in its entirety. The phallic function seeks to mystify the female rather than accord the female subject an equality. This section of my Lacanian interpretation of Conrad strongly supports certain aspects of critical discourse that suggest Conrad and Lacan offer a diminished figuration of the female.

While this is clearly problematic, Conrad's depiction of Nina is his first attempt at presenting the character of a woman and is located in his earliest period of fiction. This is a facet of Conrad's writing that evolves and enlarges itself as his work progresses, to the point where his later depictions of the female subject become noticeably more comprehensive. Indeed, what many critics acknowledge as his last, major work—*Under Western Eyes*—contains the figure of Natalia Haldin. This is a woman who is consistently seen to exhibit 'power, autonomy and clear-sightedness' (Kaplan, "Beyond Gender" 274), and appears the diametrical opposite to Nina Almayer – perhaps reflecting an increased sophistication in Conrad's capacity to examine subjectivity. Other figures such as Sophia Antonova also attest to this development, as these are 'women [that] hold revolutionary ideas not only about politics but also about sexuality' (274).

Concomitant to this observation regarding Conrad's presentation of Nina, so too is Elizabeth Grosz's critique of Lacan's model of female subjectivity only a partial engagement with his not yet fully completed theory of the feminine. Indeed, Lacan's work in this area also develops and progresses throughout his career. Most notably, the feminine structure finds a more comprehensive and compelling realisation—one predicated on a much greater sense of autonomy—in his theory of the Analyst's discourse within the four discourses, which will be explored in detail in my fourth chapter. It is in the Analyst's discourse where the framework of the feminine structure and the psychoanalyst converge to offer Lacan's most compelling

depiction of subjective autonomy.

In the same way that Nina is not Conrad's last depiction of a female, so too is Almayer reflective of an early exploration of the structure of the subject. In this first chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate how Conrad appears to be writing in accordance with basic Lacanian theoretical categories. The presence of various components identifiable in his first novel—desire, *objet a*, Name of the Father, etc—anticipates Lacan's model of the subject of desire. As I have tried to establish, the subject of desire appears to offer little room for autonomy or freedom. Its subjective location in socio-symbolic reality is decided by such determining factors as the desire of the '(m)Other' which assist in constituting the subject's fundamental fantasy. These factors seem inextricably to embed the subject of desire within a structure in which its capacity for transformation or relocation is effectively curtailed. Almayer's own ruination attests to this potential subjective stasis – immovably situated as the colonial socio-symbolic order disintegrates around him. However, this is not Conrad's last word on the subject. It is in what may be considered his first canonical novel, *Lord Jim*, that the nascent figuration of a new mode of subjectivity which dismantles these structural restrictions—and gestures towards a form of individual freedom—can first be discerned.

## Chapter Two: *Lord Jim*: From Desire to Drive

### Critical situation of *Lord Jim*

As early as 1948, F.R. Leavis damns *Lord Jim* as worthy of dismissal from consideration as one of Conrad's masterpieces. It is a work, he alleges, of two halves. The first is, admittedly, 'good Conrad' (Leavis 190) but the Patusan episode is regarded as flawed and sufficient justification for its expulsion from any canonical position. In contrast, by 1958, Albert J. Guerard argues for the innovative formal merit of the text, seeing in it 'the first novel in a new form: a form bent on involving and implicating the reader in a psycho-moral drama which has no easy solution' (126). The artistic debate over the inclusion of *Lord Jim* within the corpus of Conrad's great works has long been settled. It is now regarded as a 'technical *tour de force*' brimming with 'virtuoso narrative techniques' (Stape, "Lord Jim" 63) but the moral and ethical implications surrounding the novel still remain some of its key features salient to critical engagement. Jameson sees the ethical reading of Conrad's works and *Lord Jim* as one of the most influential, in which they 'are taken literally as books which raise the "issues" of heroism and courage' (Jameson, *Political* 197). It is this central act of Jim's jump that remains the point of departure for much critical discourse – an action that 'instantly becomes the object of universal curiosity and speculation' (Berthoud 66).

As critical literature on *Lord Jim* has developed, an approach that accounts for the influence of imperialism and its attendant moral and ethical implications upon the subject of Jim has become more explicit. This has led to Padmia Mongia asserting that the entire 'narrative of *Lord Jim* relies on the discursive field of imperialism to explore the figure of Jim' (173). It is worth briefly clarifying the usage of the term imperialism in regards to this critical enterprise. In Robert Young's perspective, imperialism is an 'ideology and a theory' (27) which is deliberately 'driven by the grandiose projects of power' (17) underpinning the British

Empire. Accordingly, it may offer an explicit ethical and moral framework—such as the code of duty in the merchant navy—which is clearly relevant in an analysis of Conrad’s text.

However, the role of colonialism can also be considered as being closely related to imperialism in the novel. While colonialism is ‘not primarily concerned with transposing cultural values’ in the same way that imperialism is, these values are still discernible ‘as a by-product of its real objectives of trade, economic exploitation and settlement’ (24). Given that the merchant navy embodies British imperial values as well as the colonial concerns of trade and economics, the terms of imperialism and colonialism will be used as closely related ones in this interpretation of the text.

Psychoanalytic criticism also acknowledges and develops examinations of subjectivity that refer to colonial and imperial structures. Stephen Ross’s *Conrad and Empire* is perhaps the most effective Lacanian reading of *Lord Jim* in terms of the establishment of Jim’s subjectivity in regards to these concerns. Ross argues that in the novel Conrad ‘sharpens his focus on the intimate bond between the psychic and the social so that we can trace [the novel’s] critique of Empire by examining Jim’s subjective experience of the novel’s dominant ideological system, complete with its limits and points of failure’ (67). Clearly, this observation correctly foregrounds the relationship between the subjectivity of Jim and imperial and colonial discourse. However, there is a further dimension to this relationship that must be considered, as it is an integral aspect of Conrad’s depiction of the subject. While the subject of Jim seems to be constituted within the ideology of imperialism, I will attempt to demonstrate that both Jim and the ideology of imperialism are fundamentally bound up with a certain configuration of space. This configuration is defined by its rationalised, unchanging qualities and indebtedness to Cartesian philosophy – a model predicated upon the belief in a ‘strictly uniform mathematical world’—a ‘world of geometry made real’ (Koyré, *Closed World* 100-101)—where space is homogenous and fully traversable. It is through a Lacanian reading that the normative imperial and colonial mentality and its ethical thought

will be revealed as inextricably connected to a specific means of charting, mapping and experiencing the world spatially.

Suggestively, Josiane Paccaud-Huguet and Paul Kintzele have already looked to notions of Lacanian subjectivity to account for the shift within *Lord Jim* between the episodes of the *Patna* and Patusan – though without a consideration of the spatial. These examinations have yielded highly intriguing outcomes. Paccaud-Huguet insightfully contemplates the role of the Lacanian real *qua das Ding* in the text; a form of the ‘prehistoric’ (Lacan, *Ethics* 87) real, which the subject can only access through the transgression of the psychoanalytic act, and will then only be experienced by the subject as ‘suffering and evil’ (Evans 207). Paul Kintzele is even more insightful in citing Lacan’s subject of drive. Curiously, neither critic incorporates the integral Lacanian ethical framework that inextricably underpins and validates their respective Lacanian perspectives. Indeed, no study so far has employed the highly provocative field of Lacanian ethics in a critique of the novel and, in particular, the ethical and moral consequences of Jim’s jump. This jump is almost universally seen as ‘an act of failure [and] an act of betrayal’ (Berthoud 66). It is perhaps through Lacanian ethics that an alternative, emancipatory gesture can be made of Jim’s leap.

A brief overview of moral and ethical criticism in Conrad must be outlined before the unconventional coordinates of Lacanian ethics can be deployed. Andrew Michael Roberts, writing of the critical approaches towards ethics and morality in regards to Conrad, observes that ‘a certain consensus seems to regard morality as normative, as involving rules or codes of conduct, and as socially or historically specific, whereas ethics represents some more general disposition or sensibility, and is more critical, self-critical, and open to question’ (“Territory” 134). Morality then can be situated as operating within a distinct group or social strata governing modes of behaviour, whereas ethics is a critical position of a broader, less determinative nature. Roberts acknowledges, however, the contestation within this field. Representative of early criticism surrounding Conrad’s ethics, Leavis himself believes ‘the



“‘good’” Conrad asserts clear moral values, “‘tradition’” being usually the key term’ (qtd. in Roberts, “Territory” 136). These critics—Leavis, Guerard, etc—see Conrad as a ‘skeptical, modern, exploring, questioning thinker [and they do] so in order to reconfirm some central value or values’ (Roberts, “Territory” 136). Alternatively, Roberts views more recent ethical criticism as explicitly probing and complicating this approach, ‘tend[ing] to be concerned with the ways in which the text, or the processes of reading, open up and challenge questions of ethical value in a way which goes beyond, or exceeds, rules, schemes, and codes of behavior’ (134).

Lacanian ethics takes this latter, questioning perspective still further. It offers a radically different and unconventional ethical framework where normative structures of community, morality and subjective possibility are exploded and reconfigured. A Lacanian ethical reading of *Lord Jim* will reveal a hitherto unseen aspect of Conrad’s novel that questions and critiques the ideology and ethics of imperialism and the individual’s experience within it – as well as disclosing a highly specific composition of space that underpins both of these elements. Lacanian thought regards conventional good and evil as repressive formations and societal norms of ethics as reflective of the ‘pathogenic nature of civilised morality’ (Evans 56). Importantly, Lacan equally condemns an ‘opposing libertine approach [as remaining] within the field of morality’ (Evans 56), as libertinism ‘contains a note of defiance, a kind of trial by ordeal in relation to that which remains the terminal point of this argument’ (Lacan, *Ethics* 4) which is conventional morality. The Lacanian analytic ethic does not conform to a conventional moral framework. Instead, it is an ‘ethic that relates action to desire’ (Evans 57), where a certain desire of the subject—a desire differentiated from what can be designated as the desire of the Other—is articulated and subjectified through an emancipatory act. To achieve this aim, the subject must ‘enter into a confrontation with [the] unconscious, [...] search for the desires that official morality barely tolerates, [and] go against the ethical ideals that rule us: at the base of all of this lies an ethical imperative for Lacan’ (de

Kesel 49).

In Lacan's model, the rightness or wrongness of an action will not be seen from the perspective of an ethical system that is dominant within the socio-symbolic order, or a system of laws governing the conduct of a group or strata of society. Rather, 'the question of ethics is to be articulated from the point of view of the location of man in relation to the real' (Lacan, *Ethics* 11). A Lacanian ethical act must be a 'transgression' (Lacan, *Ethics* 177), where 'the symbolic law the subject (also morally) clings to ultimately serves as something to be transgressed' (de Kesel 133). From the conventional ethical perspective of the socio-symbolic order, this act can only be conceived of as a 'form of evil' (Lacan, *Ethics* 189). Interestingly, there are some similarities that can be drawn between Lacan's and Nietzsche's view of ethics. For Lacan, 'not only is the [Platonic] Good not actually real' but, further, 'neither is it "'good"' [...] in term of the effects it has [upon the subject, which is] a view that is shared by Nietzsche' (Themi 10-11). However, a distinction can be drawn between the two figures concerning the matter of truth, as, for Lacan, 'the truth speaks as a lying truth in only psychoanalysis[,] not philosophy, while for Nietzsche truth is an illusion' (Babich 53) – Lacan maintains that the subject's confrontation with the unconscious can produce "truth" for him or her individually. The deployment of Lacan thus may enable a critical perspective that overturns traditional ethical thought, where the register of the real, specifically in the forms of *das Ding* and *jouissance*, will now become the privileged coordinates for reconfiguring the motivation, action and implications of Jim's leap from the *Patna*.

### **The formation of Jim as subject of desire**

To a greater extent than Conrad's other novels, *Lord Jim* is almost exclusively focused upon the subject of the title. The tale sees Jim, son of a provincial parson, as a fledgling trainee officer in the merchant navy through to his initial postings and ultimate dereliction of

duty onboard the steamship, the *Patna*. Conrad then probes Jim's repositioning and reinvention as adventurer in the far flung region of Patusan through the assistance of Marlow. Few others of Conrad's works trace the genesis, development and death of their eponymous characters in such detail.

Conrad's opening depiction of Jim, following his dismissal from the merchant navy, introduces the character in explicitly spatial terms, as he 'was an inch, perhaps two, under six feet, powerfully built and he advanced straight at you with a slight stoop of his shoulders [and] with dogged self-assertion' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 3). Suggestively, Conrad 'starts with Jim positioned in space before readers', so that this opening concentrates upon 'perceptual possibility – of angle and depth of focus, of looks, gazes, glares and contemplation' (Newton 80). The very act of perceiving Jim is predicated upon a certain conception of space from, within and into which one perceives. It is the nature of this space—and the constitution of the subject within it—that is one of the novel's chief concerns. Even the initial act of noting Jim's height, while not a conclusive example, institutes not only the act of perception but also the means of apprehending the object – through a space ascertained via a mathematical form of measurement of feet and inches. Tellingly, this form of measurement is the imperial system (it is worth noting this system was under great scrutiny in the 1890s with a Commons Select Committee recommending in 1895 that the metric system be adopted). It is an ideologically determined form of measurement, and this brief moment suggests that it is just as much Jim's subjectivity as it is the nature of the symbolic space within and through which Jim exists that will be at stake in *Lord Jim*.

Within this spatial system a snapshot of Jim's personality is sketched—he has 'dogged self-assertion'—and he is located within the strictly mercantile context of a ship's chandler. This is the role of a commercial agent who sells supplies to incoming vessels in a port, the latest post in a series of itinerant jobs that Jim has taken to escape the reputation of his crime. Conrad illustrates two interconnected ideas that further embellish his character. To

the captains of these vessels that he services Jim must be 'attentive like a son, with the patience of Job' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 3). Here, one can detect echoes of the paternal function which establishes Jim's original subjective position. These echoes are evidenced by the Christian religious reference, which recalls his father, the country parson. From a Lacanian perspective, Conrad introduces Jim's present situation with language that refers back to his familial origins. Tellingly, this hint of an intersection between the paternal law and a religious motif is constituted within the clearly commercial function of a ship's chandler. This brief allusion suggests that Jim is still functioning according to the paternal law which enacted his installation into the symbolic—the founding coordinates of his subjectivity—as the son of a parson.

This perspective can be quickly substantiated, as Conrad then shifts the temporal point of the narrative back into Jim's past. These founding coordinates intersect religious, paternal and commercial concerns – the very elements that still resonate in Jim's present situation as ship's chandler. Ross views this sequence as '[p]art of the machinery of biopolitical production that perpetuates the Imperial regime of control, [so] Jim's father brings paternal, metaphysical, and ideological pressure to bear in his relations with Jim' (80). This comment clearly elucidates the link between Jim's choice of career and the founding influence of the ideologically determined paternal metaphor *qua* Name of the Father. Conrad immediately highlights the proximity of the commercial to the religious through the introduction of Jim's family, as 'he c[omes] from a parsonage. Many commanders of fine merchant-ships come from these abodes of piety and peace' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 4). What is discernible here is the sense that there is an ideological alignment, or inter-connection, between these roles of parson and commander in the socio-symbolic order.

Conrad develops the 'specifically ideological import' of this notion by presenting Jim's father as the 'protector of vested interests' (Ross 80). Indeed, the father 'possessed such certain knowledge of the Unknowable as made for the righteousness of people in cottages

without disturbing the ease of mind of those whom an unerring Providence enables to live in mansions' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 4). Ross clearly establishes that the discourse of the parson unquestioningly supports the ideological *status-quo* of a fundamentally unequal economic and social model. However, what is further identifiable is that the relation between normative morality and the dominant mode of capitalist economics is established as coextensive. The 'righteousness' or moral rectitude of the lower orders is sustained alongside the 'ease of mind', or moral equilibrium, of the ruling classes. This ideology of the parsonage had 'stood for centuries' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 4). In the case of Jim, the rights of the country parson—a position in the Church of England with its associated property—'had belonged to the family for generations' (4), which reflects how deeply it would permeate his family's discourse and, in turn, his own subjectivity.

It is from within these ideological coordinates that Jim is constituted as a subject and his career in the sea decided upon. Conrad delineates this through a grammatically ambiguous construction, 'when after a course of light holiday literature his vocation for the sea had declared itself, he was sent at once to a training-ship for officers' (4). Here, Ross interprets the justification for Jim's departure as an economic one, given that Jim was 'one of five sons' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 4) and assigns the choice of vocation to overt parental pressure as 'at no point are we given an indication that Jim declares his intentions to his parents' (Ross, *Empire* 94). The conclusion is that financial constraints must have been key to sending Jim away. However, a more nuanced Lacanian reading of this sentence may further clarify its meaning. Ross accurately draws attention to the fact the "'vocation'" is the only subject of the sentence' (94). From the Lacanian perspective, this is exactly the desire of the Other, as manifested in this 'vocation' that 'had declared itself' through Jim. The ambiguous pronoun 'itself' foregrounds the nature of the vocation as a desire not wholly of Jim's conscious choice but as constituted through the Other. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Lacanian psychoanalysis suggests that 'man not only desires *what* the Other desires, but he desires it

*in the same way* [,] his desire is structured exactly like the Other's. Man learns to desire as *an other*, as if he were some other person [italics in original]' (Fink, *Subject* 54). It is the father's 'vocation' imposed upon the symbolic position of the son. Conceived within the desire of the Other, Jim is confined within its imperialist-religious ideological parameters and is hindered by the Other's desire. It is also worth noting the structural similarities between the clergy and the merchant navy. They are both rigidly hierarchical, dominated by men and focused upon the justification and expansion of the British interests abroad as well as maintaining the ideological *status-quo* at home.

In a manner similar to Almayer, Jim's subjectivity is 'hemmed in, kept down, and silenced as much as possible by the ego and superego, by desire as it forms in language on the basis of the Other's discourse, which transmits the Other's desires, values and ideals' (Fink, *Clinical* 208) – all of which coalesce within Jim. Conrad's concise, detailed portrait of Jim's parental origins recalls Almayer's mother eulogising upon the former glories of Amsterdam in *Almayer's Folly*. These moments reveal the formative impact of the Other upon the subject, but more importantly the extent to which these symbolic coordinates may finally determine the subjects' destiny. Almayer, for example, remains utterly subordinated to the determination of the Other – he remains where Lingard places him and seeks to recapture the lost glories of his mother's birthplace. Constituted within his father's ideological frame, Jim is the Lacanian subject of desire – the desire as founded by the discourse of his parent, the subject founded 'by desire as it forms in language on the basis of the Other's discourse' (Fink, *Clinical* 208).

However, this is not Lacan's, or Conrad's, final word on the subjective position. Jim's initial subjective structure must be distinguished from the Lacanian subject of drive – a subject who has moved outside of his or her predetermined desire and has accessed a mode of *jouissance* that enables the subject to enjoy a form of satisfaction. To accede to this different form of subjectivity 'involves bringing about a modification in the relationship

between satisfaction and desire—that is, between the drives and their inhibition, between the subject of *jouissance* [or drive] and the subject of desire’ (Fink, *Clinical* 216), which for Lacan forms the basis of ethical possibility. At this early stage in the narrative, the structure of Jim’s subjectivity is that of the subject of desire. This becomes increasingly evident as Conrad depicts his life at the officer’s training ship. Jim’s fantasy is constructed within a symbolic landscape dense with signifiers of mercantile wealth and capitalist production and from his position in this landscape, ‘he look[s] down’ and contemplates ‘a stirring life in the world of adventure’ (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 5). The symbolic frame of Jim’s fantasy is predicated upon an explicitly economic landscape; the ‘dreary prose’ which ‘is daily life in the universal factory called capitalism’ (Jameson, *Political* 198) – as if Jim’s very capacity for fantasy is dependent upon this ideological framework. Jim is shown to fantasise while ‘the factory chimneys r[ise] perpendicular against a grimy sky[.] He could see the little ships departing, the broad-beamed ferries constantly on the move’ (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 5). Conrad depicts Jim’s desire for adventure as enmeshed within a commercial fabric hewn from the same ideology as espoused by his father, where his life of adventure will soon be enabled by the very mercantile vessels he now watches sail away from the factories for the purposes of global trade. This consolidates Jim as a subject of desire. He is apparently wholly at ease amongst this mercantile scenario and is attuned to his father’s perspective as a ‘protector of vested [commercial] interests’ (Ross, *Empire* 80), for which Jim himself will now become a protective agent as an officer aboard a merchant vessel.

### **The fundamental fantasy and the *passage à l’acte***

It is here that the outline of Jim’s fundamental fantasy becomes evident. As revealed in the chapter on *Almayer’s Folly*, the fundamental fantasy is where the subject’s ‘individual fantasies’ comprise ‘the subject’s most profound relation to the Other’s desire’ (Fink, *Subject*

62). Onboard the training vessel, Jim sees 'himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line [-] always an example of devotion to duty and as unflinching as a hero in a book' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 5). In this sequence, Conrad subordinates all of these moments and their significance to the final phrase of Jim 'always [being] an example of devotion to duty'. Each individual fantasy is ultimately framed as having a moral quality to it, and each one satisfies a moral requirement of duty which appears to be the action of saving people – an activity not unlike the role of a parson. Of course, an important question remains; for whom does the subject, Jim, enact these actions inside the fantasy? Ed Pluth states that the 'general purpose of fantasy' is to 'stage oneself as the object of the Other's desire' (92), wherein here Jim enacts a fantasmatic performance that demonstrates his adherence to 'duty'. This duty is the upholding of the successful workings of a capitalist ideology that 'made for the righteousness of people in cottages without disturbing the ease of mind' of the ruling elite – the dominant ideology of the Other. This duty is therefore a moral undertaking as well, and Stephen Ross has highlighted how 'duty' functions as a 'privileged signifier' (95) in the novel. Conrad skillfully portrays Jim imagining each of his adventurous scenarios—sinking ships, cutting masts in storms, etc—as merely an enactment that is then ultimately subordinated to Jim's 'duty' for the commercial enterprise of the merchant navy.

It is highly appropriate then that Conrad weaves into this scene of Jim's fantasy the actual storm around the training ship that offers Jim a very real opportunity for fulfilling his duty which he consciously enjoys imagining. For it is at this moment that the nascent signs of a subjective space beyond Jim as a subject of desire are discernible. The multitudinous violence of the storm clearly overwhelms Jim with its 'fierce purpose of the gale, a furious earnestness in the screech of the wind, in the brutal tumult of earth and sky, that seem[s] directed at him' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 5). Against this unsettling backdrop, Conrad portrays Jim as almost bereft of the capacity for conscious action, as if in Lacanian terms his ego is



diminished or disempowered. He '[sees] the boat' (5), 'hear[s] a splash' and '[h]e lean[s] over' (6) but cannot think about these events. Through a series of short sentences Conrad illustrates an almost arrested working of the conscious mind where Jim is robbed of comprehension. What supports this reading is that Conrad then contrasts the immediate aftermath of Jim's inertia with the description that 'Jim look[s] up with the pain of conscious defeat in his eyes' (6) to the captain of the ship. It is tempting to suggest that it is an unconscious victory that immediately precedes this moment of 'conscious defeat'. The phrase 'conscious defeat' suggests the workings of the conscious ego or the subject of the statement. The 'pain' he feels is in accordance with his ideal-ego, the self-conception Jim enjoys and believes himself to be but who on this occasion he failed to live up to being. Conrad explicitly emphasises this process of Jim consciously deciding how to view this event later in the same passage, as he is shown to now 'kn[ow] what to think of it' (6) and similarly later when '[h]e kn[ows] what to think' (7) about his failure. What is visible here is the need for the event to be reconciled to his imaginary subjectivity – to revalidate his conscious ego as 'he exult[s] with fresh certitude' (7) his desire for adventure. Conrad's repeated emphasis on the mechanisms of Jim's conscious mind needing to reconcile his failure to act can thus be interpreted in the sense that the actual origin of his inertia is from the unconscious. What was conscious inaction becomes an unconscious action.

It is possible to name this unconscious action, coming as it does from a point beyond Jim as a subject of desire. Ed Pluth offers a concise definition of Lacan's concept of the *passage a l'acte* – a movement that precedes the act itself that can free a subject from the desire of the Other. Pluth categorises it by 'its relation to fantasy[.] Whereas acting out is an enactment of a fantasy, a *passage a l'acte* seems to be a reaction to (and against) this fantasy, to this "scene" in which the subject maintains a desirable position for the Other' (100). What is the fantasy that Jim here reacts against? That of the desire of the Other: Jim's fantasies of cutting away masts, controlling mutinies and becoming an agent of the dominant

capitalist ideology espoused by his father and envisaged in the fantasy sequence preceding the storm around the training ship. Jim is unconsciously protesting against the position into which he is installed in the symbolic order—trainee officer of the merchant navy—a position determined by the paternal injunction in the form of the parson, his father. Lacan appropriately deems the *passage a l'acte* a 'confrontation [with] the father's desire, upon which the [the subject's] entire conduct is built' (*Anxiety* 111) and in which the subject temporarily 'evacuate[s] from the stage' (111) of his or her fundamental fantasy. As will be explored later, Jim desires a form of adventure and existence that is not subordinated to the requirements of imperialism and where he can reconfigure his own identity outside of the symbolic confines which initially establish his subjectivity.

Pluth makes a distinction that is of crucial relevance for this moment of Jim's inaction onboard the training ship. He observes that 'a *passage a l'acte* is not yet an act *tout court*, because although it is a sort of protest against the fantasy, it does not yet leave the fantasmatic scenario behind altogether—it does not traverse fantasy' (Pluth 100). Indeed, this comment appears highly appropriate, as at this juncture Jim is still embedded within the symbolic community of the merchant navy and on a conscious level only reaffirms his 'avidity for adventure' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 7) after his inertia. So there is no question of him wholly rejecting his fantasy of becoming a sailor-hero yet. Conrad's physical positioning of Jim in the aftermath of the rescue performed by the other trainee officers is also telling. On one level, it can of course be explicable due to the pique to Jim's pride and vanity when 'he brood[s] apart that evening' (6) and remains 'unnoticed and apart from the noisy crowd of boys' (7). Yet it can also be viewed as emblematic of the unconscious fact that a potential aspect of his subjectivity beyond desire does not, quite simply, abide the ideological symbolic position he finds himself in. Considering that Lacan's subject is initially conceived of as a subject of desire, it is vital to identify how and from where the subject might enable some kind of autonomy to act against the fantasy that is a product of the Other's desire. The answer is from the real in

the mode of *jouissance*, where 'something of *jouissance* continues to escape the fantasmatic situation[.] This part that escapes is where we can find the possibility for a different structuration of the subject, in an act' (Pluth 87). It must therefore be understood that the subject of desire does not fully demarcate Lacan's conception of subjective possibility. However, this further subjective possibility may only be reached through what is designated the ultimate ethical gesture of Lacanian psychoanalysis – the act, the transgression of the symbolic law of normative morality and access into *das Ding*.

### **The space of imperialism and the subject**

Conrad's depiction of Jim's entry into active service in *Lord Jim* deepens his exploration of imperialist ideology. This ideology offers a normative morality that sustains and endorses the commercial enterprise – a morality which is articulated by the sermonising of Jim's father. What becomes apparent is that Conrad appears to suggest that this morality is coextensive with and operative through a certain conception of space – an imperialist symbolic space. It is at this precise intersection of morality and space that Conrad further develops the subjectivity of Jim. Importantly, Conrad's shift in narrative focus from Jim as trainee to Jim as active officer enables the examination of the minutiae of the commercial enterprise of the merchant navy at work and the moral consequences attendant to it. Whilst the ostensible narrative focus is on that 'obscure body of men held together by [a] fidelity to a certain standard of conduct' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 32), this organisation still 'insinuates the ideology of rationalization and secularization into relatively undeveloped regions via a progressive economic dominance that owes loyalty to no individual nation, but only to the postnational capitalist value of the bottom line' (Ross 68). So, while the morality at work within this commercial group is localised by Conrad and made specific as the code of duty of the merchant navy, it is also broadly commensurate with the wider morality inherent in the imperialist project operating on a global scale, a morality likened to the functioning of

‘general social laws’ by Raymond Williams (qtd. in Jameson, *Political* 265).

There is a disquieting initial description of the Patna as a vessel ‘eaten up with rust worse than a condemned water-tank’ (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 9) with a captain who ‘brutalise[s] all those he [is] not afraid of’ (9). The sea-worthiness of the Patna is implicitly denounced by Conrad, yet this inherent structural decay is simply camouflaged over as ‘she had been painted outside and whitewashed inside’ (9). In no way however does this prevent the ship taking on board eight hundred pilgrims bound for Mecca, raising immediate concerns as to the ethical implications of the commercial venture itself and reflecting the profit motive of minimal outlay for maintenance—in a simple ‘whitewashing’—but with maximum return in revenue. This incipient tension is then modulated by the image of the pilgrims boarding the Patna. Initially, they seem to be suffused with a vivacity and liveliness that emphasises their innate humanity and sense of community. The boarding teems with familial gestures highlighting the human quality of the pilgrims. They are shown to be ‘men and women with faith and hopes, with affections and memories’ that come at ‘the call of a idea’, including ‘strong men at the head of family parties[,] young boys with fearless eyes glancing curiously, shy little girls’ (10). While superficially distinguished by gender, age and temperament, they are curiously likened to clear water. The comparison of the pilgrims to ‘water filling a cistern’ and ‘water rising silently even with the rim’ (10) unsettlingly conveys the group as a homogenous entity and subtly elides the differences between them that are initially highlighted. It is here that Conrad begins delicately to expose the reificatory consequences of the capitalist commercial framework.

Conrad intensifies this homogenisation of the pilgrims in the captain’s remark to Jim: ““Look at dese cattle,”” said the German skipper to his new chief mate’ (*Lord Jim* 10), which fails to elicit any conscious criticism from the young sailor. What is interesting here is the funneling of these initially vivid images of the pilgrims—enunciated through long, extended sentences—into the factual, uniform conclusion of the captain. It is as if Conrad slowly

increases the pilgrims' reification during the period of them boarding the commercial space embodied by the *Patna*. This intensification culminates in the statement that they are 'cattle' – dehumanised into an animal product and transformed into a uniform, commercial material. This reification is further alluded to by the absence of the officers' names during this exchange. The seamen are referred to solely by their symbolic position—that of captain and first mate—suggesting that these pilgrims are visually processed by impersonal, hierarchical mechanisms of the commercial imperial system embodied by the officers, which transforms both worker and passenger into a homogenous, uniform category. This disturbing perspective is heightened by Conrad as the narrator too refers to the pilgrims as 'human cargo' (11) – which garners an increasing sense that the normative morality of the dominant capitalist ideology is complicit with the transformation of the human into a commercial material. A Lacanian perspective can help clarify this textual moment. Lacan states that 'the service of goods [...] is the position of traditional ethics' (*Ethics* 314), which suggests normative morality is inextricably bound up with material values, so that the commercial becomes commensurate with the moral. Accordingly, Lacan has a strictly

economic definition of "the good." He reserves this term for that dimension of (symbolic) order in which supply and demand are geared to one another in an exchange that meets the needs of the subject. Here the "good" ("*le bien*") stands for "the domain of goods," meaning both spiritual (e.g., moral) values and purely material values (commodities). (de Kesel 147)

Therefore, in Lacanian thought, normative morality, or the "common good", is ultimately in the service of commercial interests whereby the dominant capitalist system encapsulates the moral order – so that the ideology espoused by Jim's father ensures the free flow of goods and services as evinced aboard the *Patna*.

It seems appropriate that Conrad then offers a depiction of socio-symbolic reality

where the composition of the natural physical world is figured in strictly rational and mechanistic terms and that the conventional moral system is complicit with this spatial system. The moral assertions implicit in the skipper's terminology are seamlessly integrated by the narrative in the aforementioned 'human cargo' and the ship itself is then embedded within the narrative's constellation of space and spatial movement. Most important, however, is that the vessel occupies a central and integral position in this constellation. The *Patna* voyages while every 'morning the sun, as if keeping pace in his revolutions with the progress of the pilgrimage, emerge[s] with a silent burst of light exactly at the same distance astern of the ship' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 11). Here is a curiously precise geometrical balance between the space of the natural world in the 'revolutions' of the sun and the *Patna* itself. The light is 'exactly' the 'same distance' every day – a calibrated, cyclical movement where both ship and physical world operate in a pristine balance, as if this sequence of the *Patna's* voyage indeed embodies a 'serenely Newtonian cosmos, with its reassuring planes, lines, circles and spheres' (Coroneos 137). Conrad develops this homology through his description of the voyage as later the 'propeller turn[s] without a check, as though its beat [is] part of the scheme of a safe universe' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 11). The existence of both the *Patna* and the physical world it moves through appear as crafted from the same constituents of a rationally determined, mechanistic system. It 'turn[s] without a check'—effortlessly—in a planned, schematic motion that is within a balanced, 'safe universe'. This secure system is present from the microcosmic oscillations of the propeller blade out to the macrocosmic constellation of the wider 'universe'. Further, the *Patna* is figured by Conrad as traversing an area that itself appears uniform. He depicts an environment composed of a homogenous matter where 'under the sinister splendor of the sky the sea, blue and profound, remain[s] still, without a stir, without a ripple, without a wrinkle – viscous, stagnant, dead' (11). This bland homogeneity of the sea conveys a sense of stagnation and deadness that could also refer to the moribund state of the moral system as much as the mechanistic nature of the world

within which the *Patna* exists.

Conrad unquestionably presents the *Patna* as a commercial venture. It is also an emblem of capitalist imperialism that is positioned by Conrad as functioning as the focal point or pivot of an emphatically rational conception of space. He situates the ship 'into the circular stillness of water and sky with the black speck of the moving hull remaining everlastingly in its centre' (12). The 'circular stillness' builds upon this geometrical homology between the *Patna* and the physical world, as wherever it sails to the ship will always exist fixed 'everlastingly' at the 'centre' of any spatial circumference or system. Within this spatial system which the *Patna* triumphantly occupies, Conrad revealingly situates the subject of Jim. Just as much as the *Patna* is positioned as occupying the centre of space moving faultlessly according to its governing laws, so Jim, in his conscious ego, stands securely astride this spatial perfection, elevated upon the navigational centre of the ship. On 'the bridge [Jim] [is] penetrated by the great certitude of unbounded safety and peace that could be read on the silent aspect of nature' (12). Jim, the subject of desire, the *Patna* and the physical world are geometrically aligned in a secure, measured universe where 'safety' and 'peace' connote a moral equilibrium and nature is a material to be 'read'. Conrad develops the dependency upon and inter-relationship between Jim's subjectivity and this spatially reliable universe as 'his footsteps in the vast silence were loud to his own ears, as if echoed by the watchful stars' (13), connoting that Jim's bodily movements are intimately aligned with the broader cosmological coordinates of the physical universe. What becomes apparent is that the imperial subject appears to be bound up with a specific means of charting, configuring and experiencing the world that is fundamentally spatial in nature. This co-extensiveness between the subject and the space of the symbolic order is deepened by Conrad as this sequence progresses.

Conrad develops this finely calibrated sequence by rendering indistinguishable the physical reality of the sea itself with the means of apprehending and representing this reality.

This idea is discernible where the 'sheet of paper portraying the depths of the sea present[s] a shiny surface[,] a surface as level and smooth as the glimmering surface of the waters' (13). Here, as earlier, Conrad places an emphasis on the superficial quality of this means of apprehension and subtly alludes to the deficiencies of this system. The 'depths' of the sea are only 'portrayed' as Conrad draws attention to the very system of rational perception itself. This lack of substantial depth inherent in this perceptual system is equally discernible towards the labour maintaining the ship's engines. Just as the 'depths' of the sea are not directly experienced through a system of perception, so too are the 'short metallic clangs bursting out suddenly in the depths of the ship, the harsh scrape of a shovel, the violent slam of a furnace door' (13) made by the faceless, anonymous workers below. They remain hidden and swiftly passed over, contrasting to the explicit fact that the 'steamer [goes] on evenly ahead, without a sway' (13) in a benign, almost gentle tone. It is worth referring to Fredric Jameson's comment regarding this moment. Jameson draws attention to the 'labour which produces and reproduces the world itself [and] sustains the whole fabric of reality continuously in being' (*Political* 202). This is suggestive of Conrad's intricately calibrated depiction of the *Patna's* existence inextricably predicated upon the unseen, 'conveniently muffled and intermittent' and 'easy to ignore' (203) labour down below.

The symmetry between this model of physical reality and the rational means of perceiving during the *Patna's* voyage is again foregrounded by Conrad in a moment of 'narrative calm' that has been noticed not only by Con Coroneos for the unusually cohesive manner in which 'pencil, ocean and paper interpenetrate as incurious equals' (143), but also by Donald R. Benson<sup>7</sup> for how the 'space and time of the voyage gradually assume the ideal, geometric stasis of the chart itself' (139). This idea is visible when Jim sees 'the white streak of the wake drawn as straight by the ship's keel upon the sea as the black line drawn by the pencil upon the chart' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 14). The movement of the ship affects the same action—'drawn'—on the water as much as the pencil has 'drawn' the line on the chart,



inarguably highlighting the homology between the two actions. Further, the tools that help articulate a mathematical formulation of reality are repeatedly woven into the text. Conrad mentions that '[p]arallel rulers with a pair of dividers repose' (13) on a 'chart pegged out with four drawing pins [...] abaft the steering-gear case', and that a 'patent log on the taffrail periodically r[ings] a single tinkling stroke for every mile traversed' (12) so that space travelled through is measured, logged and quantified.

What becomes highly significant is that bracketed within these moments of collusion between this spatial model of physical reality and its means of apprehension is Jim's subjective departure into fantasy. Contemplating the 'high peace of sea and sky' with 'something like gratitude (13), Jim is equally content appreciating their ideologically determined means of representation, such as when he 'glance[s] at the compass' and then performs a 'leisurely twist of his body [...] in the very excess of well-being' (13). Conrad presents what is a typical action for Jim at 'such times'. He fantasises about 'valorous deeds' and is shown to love 'these dreams'. For Jim, they are the 'best parts of life, its secret truth, its hidden reality', as they carry 'his soul away with them and ma[ke] it drunk with the divine philtre of an unbounded confidence in itself' (13). Before this fantasy sequence, Jim sees the surface of the waters perfectly aligned with the surface of the map, and after his fantasising he sees the straightness of the ship's movement 'drawn' upon both the water and chart. It is as if Jim is only able to actuate this fantasy sequence as a consequence of a particular ideologically determined spatial system operating within the socio-symbolic order. It is a system in which his subjectivity is constituted and it is only through the means of the map—a representation of this spatial system—that he is able to conceptualise this fantasy. Jim here is the subject of desire, determined by the desire of the Other. It is this socio-symbolic Other which is composed of Cartesian rational space and an imperial capitalist morality. Jim's very subjective capacity for fantasy is shown to be determined by and dependent upon this ideological spatial system at work in the text. Conrad's previous depiction of Jim's fantasy at

the novel's opening was predicated upon a distinctly commercial landscape of factory and manufacturing and here it is in a similarly mechanistic vein that Conrad enables the subject of Jim to fantasise.

Conrad's world, which the *Patna* and Jim both journey through and are constituted by, recalls that of scientific rationalism. Lacanian thought 'already recognizes in this mathematical approach to reality an initial affirmation of the primacy of the signifier. It is not our insight into their real kernel that explains the state of things, this is done by a self-functioning symbolic system that in itself has nothing to do with reality as such' (de Kesel 59). This scientific model of reality is commensurate with and actuated through the 'primacy of the signifier' whereby the Lacanian real is precluded from this conception of space. And yet, as referenced earlier, it is only through an eventual encounter with the real that an ethical act in the Lacanian sense can be enacted that would enable the subject to move beyond the restrictive desire of the Other.

Given the proximity of Jim's subjectivity to the 'watchful stars' (*Lord Jim* 13), it is appropriate that Conrad extends his depiction of the physical world surrounding the young seaman to their outermost rational and scientific limits. The *Patna* is shown to move 'so smoothly that her onward motion [is] imperceptible to the senses of men, as though she [is] a crowded planet speeding through the dark spaces of ether' (14), as both the *Patna* and planets follow the same laws of measurable, ordered motion through a mathematically quantifiable space. Lacan's understanding of a mathematically determined conception of reality is deeply influenced by Alexander Koyré and it is worth considering this project alongside Conrad's figuration of the *Patna's* journey to tease out a possible similarity and to serve as a bridge between their works. Koyré writes of a 'world created by the Cartesian God, that is, the world of Descartes[,] a strictly uniform mathematical world, a world of geometry made real about which our clear and distinct ideas give us a certain and evident knowledge' (*Closed World* 100-101). This 'strictly uniform mathematical world' sounds distinctly like that

of the *Patna*'s, with its constant references to the tools of geometrical measurement – the compass, the dividers, among other objects. Conrad's depiction of a physical reality indistinguishable from the maps and charts that seek to represent it almost appears to be the 'world of geometry made real'. This spatial association can be developed by reference to the project of Enlightenment thought which Conrad explores through his conception of 'militant geography'. Con Coroneos observes how the spatial imperative of 'militant geography' seeks to fully circumscribe the world so that 'when completed it will be homogenous, infinitely divisible, regulated by Cartographic convention [and] enveloping the earth' (28). According to Coroneos, this space is Cartesian – the *res extensa*. It is a space that is 'homogenous, infinitely extensive' (35) and it is this quality of being 'infinitely extensive' that recalls Conrad's gesture of similitude between the *Patna* and the 'planet speeding through the dark spaces of ether' – an infinite space that functions anywhere and everywhere according to the same immutable scientific laws.

In *Lord Jim* this science is, however, still subordinated to the capitalist imperative as it is the commercial vessel of the *Patna* that is 'everlastingly' in the centre of this symbolic system. In a Lacanian sense, this is unsurprising. Science—'including the human sciences—has fully integrated itself into the "'service of goods'" and thus by definition cannot reach the most radical, real dimension of desire' (de Kesel 267); a desire beyond that of the Other. This commercially determined position is where Jim exists as subject. The scientific model of reality within which the *Patna* exists will only sustain the subject of desire; the subject determined by the socio-symbolic Other *qua* the ideology of Jim's father. The previous assertion that Conrad's space here is Cartesian is not as far from a Lacanian reading as may be supposed. Lacan's inversion of the Cartesian subject is relevant to this consideration, as for this subject it is the 'fact that he thinks that serves as the foundation for his being; therein he joins thought to the speaking subject "'I'" [and] such a view is rather utopian' (Fink, *Subject* 43). The depiction of Jim's subjectivity on board the *Patna* presents such a pristine

cohesiveness and utopianism that can be located at the level of Jim's ego. It is this Cartesian space that lends Jim the 'unbounded safety and peace' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 12) within which he can fantasise, and the presentation of Jim offers similarities to 'Descartes' subject' that believes "'I'" corresponds to the level of the ego, [...] taken to be master of its own thoughts and whose thoughts are believed to correspond to "'external reality'" (Fink, *Subject* 43). Jim's experience of symbolic reality exhibits strikingly similar characteristics and this very same correspondence in the *Patna* section of *Lord Jim*.

What is therefore constructed by Conrad is a system of space that is coextensive with a normative morality and subjective structure and is elevated to a position of indisputable dominance – all subordinated to the needs of imperial capitalism. However, Conrad continually alludes to the blind spots of this seemingly cohesive, flawless artifice of symbolic reality both through the emphasis on the superficial aspect of this type of perception but also with reference to a spatial void textured into the novel. It is present first on an individual subject level when Jim himself felt in an 'abyss of unrest' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 8) when on board his previous vessel. It is also discernible on a wider structural level on the *Patna* as Conrad inscribes 'an abyss forever open in the wake of the ship' (11). Josiane Paccaud-Huguet notes a 'threshold contiguous to the abyss [that] seems to oscillate within the range of time and space' ("Sublime" 159) present in this sequence. This comment aptly describes these Conradian allusions to a void-like absence around Jim and the *Patna* that 'is not topologically located: it lies within and without, it is *extimate*'. This absence 'is not a region, a ghostly shape, but a *pressure point*, a blind spot [...] where the dimension of being threatens the order of meaning [*italics in original*]' (160). Given the ethical dimension of *Lord Jim*, it is tempting to see this 'blind spot' as an echo of the real *qua das Ding*. With these moments of unease and disquiet marking the text, it is appropriate for Conrad to destabilise the cohesive, Cartesian spatial certitude of Jim and the *Patna* when it collides with the unknown object. The question, had 'the earth been checked in her course?', and the whole environment as

‘poised on the brow of yawning destruction’ (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 17), reflects Conrad’s deliberate interrogation of this supposedly inviolable model of space.

It is of no surprise then that after his elevated position upon the bridge of the *Patna*, Jim is next encountered ‘st[anding] elevated in the witness-box (18) of the official inquiry with its relentless ‘aiming at facts’ (18) – a term repeatedly employed during the inquiry process, during one of Conrad’s frequent temporal shifts of narrative between the before and after of Jim’s jump. This ‘factual’ constitution of the inquiry reflects the symbolic order’s need to retroactively suture the rupture of the symbolic in which the *Patna* is involved. It also enacts the rational Cartesian conception of space mapped, quantified and fully understood. Alongside the merciless demand for ‘facts’, there is an equally discernible repetition of the pronoun ‘I’ in Jim’s testimony, as Conrad structures most of the sentences in the active voice: ‘I took’, ‘I thought’, ‘I lowered’, ‘I knew’ (19) among multiple other examples. Jim speaks in a sequential, methodical way precisely elaborating his subjective movement during the crisis. In a Lacanian sense, this functions as an assertion and validation of the subject of the statement or ego. This is the falsely secure Cartesian subject who must suture over the encounter with the real and the only subject recognised in this inquiry within the socio-symbolic order. Every utterance of Jim’s painstakingly maps out all of his traversal of the *Patna*’s space and climaxes in the narrator’s acknowledgement of the need for ‘facts [as] tangible, open to the senses [and] occupying their space in place and time’ (19). The moment of the inquiry, as well as Conrad’s depiction of Jim on board the *Patna* earlier, would seem to support the Lacanian idea that there is a ‘dialectic working between space in the environment and space in the psyche’ (Brennan 280). This correspondence will be more fully explored in my next chapter on *The Secret Agent*, where Conrad deepens and extends his exploration of this inter-relationship between space and the ego.

### The moral perspective of Marlow and Brierly

Conrad's shift from omniscient third-person narrator in *Lord Jim* to a reliance on the narrative as told by Marlow articulates various concerns of the author first highlighted within the opening section. Firstly, it suggests a critique of the fully traversable, wholly measured Cartesian symbolic space. Conrad leaves behind an omniscient narrative perspective at the very moment he fractures the very possibility of a fully secure spatial ideological model. It is then that Marlow takes over the narration. This Lacanian reading of *Lord Jim* will assert that Marlow presents a transitional figure within this commercial imperial symbolic. He is a figure that is frequently articulated as functioning within the same ideology as Jim's father—representing an endorsement of the moral and ethical *status-quo* of the capitalist order where morality is subordinated to the 'service of goods'—but a figure that bridges this dominant model established at the text's start with the possibility of subjective transformation. This possibility is most keenly anticipated by Marlow's friend, the adventurer Stein.

Initially, Conrad's presentation of Marlow in his storytelling role with his audience sees his first utterance frame his narration in terms of conventional moral and religious poles, where each person 'has a guardian angel, if you fellows will concede to me that each of us has a familiar devil as well' (*Lord Jim* 22). Beyond the obvious Christian ethical framework that continues on from Jim's father, it also confirms that this is a shared moral code, with his rhetoric assuming the ideological complicity of his audience. This frame of normative morality permeates Marlow's description of the build-up to Jim's appearance and in particular the bureaucratic machinery of the commercial organisation of which they are members. He describes one administrator, Ruthvel, giving another character a 'severe lecture – on official morality, I suppose' (24) and when Marlow first catches sight of Jim his expectation is that

Jim should not look 'unconcerned and unapproachable' which makes Marlow 'angry' (26).

Marlow's visceral opprobrium is distinctly hewn from the same moral system as that of the organisation of which he is an officer, and his oft-cited declaration that Jim was 'one of us' (28) clearly implies that Jim is subordinate to the same moral system as himself.

Nevertheless, it is during Marlow's contemplation of Jim's moral failings that Conrad suggests a continued ruthlessness at work inside the imperialist commercial moral code. Asserting a Christian frame of reference at the start of this narration that echoes back to the discourse of the parson, Marlow ponders his own role in training young sailors in disturbingly condescending tones, as he anecdotally and callously observes of the recruits that 'some [have] grown up now and some drowned by this time, but all good stuff for the sea. I don't think I have done badly by it either' (28). Whether living or dead, the sailors trained by Marlow are reduced into 'stuff', a material, processed for the capitalist enterprise of the imperial project in a suggestive moment that structurally echoes the German captain's homogenisation of the pilgrims into 'cattle'. The ruthlessness of this ethical situation is later heightened; both Marlow and Brierly consider the embarrassment caused for the imperial hierarchy that Jim's stubborn desire to stand trial produces much more than they think about the pilgrims' compromised safety due to the rust-eaten condition of the *Patna*.

Marlow's figurative appreciation of Jim—that he looks 'as genuine as a new sovereign', but that he has 'some infernal alloy in his metal' (29)—fixes him in a commercial context but also, importantly, in a moral one. The reference to the 'infernal' within Jim again refers to Christian moral coordinates that colour Marlow's ethical judgment. It also connects with his need to assuage the 'doubt of the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct' (32) that Jim's action has evoked. Marlow believes in the existence of a universal, immutable moral principle that is embodied in the duties of the merchant seaman. Conrad's textual image 'conflates the questions of the value of the "new sovereign"', of Jim's inner worth, as well as those of the validity of the "fixed standard of conduct" and of the

legitimacy of Empire' (Pauly, "Logic Delirium" 176) in *Lord Jim*. Of course, the latter notions regarding Empire's legitimacy are ones with which Marlow appears less concerned. Notably, Lacan's response to this premise would be that there is no sovereign good as conceived in Marlow's terms. Instead, the 'Sovereign Good, which is *das Ding* [...] is a forbidden good, and [...] there is no other good' (Lacan, *Ethics* 70). This comment hints at where a Lacanian reading may locate the axis upon which Jim can renegotiate his subjective structure – that if a good exists, it is what may be considered, from a normative imperial view, a gross transgression or evil.

The character of Captain Brierly, the 'big assessor' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 19) and head of the inquiry, is the epitome of both moral authority and also the ethical expertise of the organisation of which he and Marlow are both members. Marlow acknowledges he had 'never in his life made a mistake, never had an accident' (37) and he is marked with those signifiers demonstrative of the imperial model of Cartesian space – the same space the *Patna* earlier traverses. Conrad highlights an '[inscribed] gold chronometer presented to him by the underwriters' (36) and 'silver-mounted binoculars' (37) that had 'a suitable inscription from some foreign government' (36) gifted to him as testament to his excellence. In both of these items inheres a dense network of imperial ideological discourse. In particular, the chronometer is a navigational device used to measure a mathematical uniform space *qua* longitudinal coordinates. Of course, longitude is a man-made system predicated upon the Prime Meridian of the Royal Greenwich Observatory established by the 1884 Washington Conference<sup>8</sup> – a triumph of British diplomacy. The binoculars are a device able to collapse distances of viewed space and magnify an individual's perception. Both of these items embody scientific rationalism and reflect man's supremacy over the earth. That Conrad chooses the valuable metals of gold and silver for these devices exemplifies this rationalised space as a distinctly commercial and political material, as these precious items were presented to Brierly by a commercial organisation, the underwriters, as well as a political one



– a foreign government.

His conversation with Marlow where he tries to dispose of Jim quietly to spare embarrassment for the service articulates the true morality of imperialism. As Ross insightfully observes, Brierly ‘formulates the outrage equally in terms of failure of humane conduct and in terms of a broken contract to deliver goods. In both his comments, Brierly makes direct equivalences between the pilgrims and “property”’ (Ross 71-72). Indeed, he explicitly declares that ‘I don’t give a snap for all the pilgrims that ever came out of Asia, but a decent man would not have behaved like this to a full cargo of old rags in bales’ (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 43). This comparison is even worse than the German captain’s reference to cattle but offers an ideological conclusion to this thread of ethical designation started in the operation of the *Patna*. It is very true that Marlow’s ‘failure to recognize the truly troubling implications of these equivalences points to the pervasiveness of the capitalist processes’ (Ross 72). Indeed, Marlow himself only rejects Brierly’s suggestion of paying Jim to disappear because of the condescending manner in which Brierly asks, which results in the seaman feeling ‘no more noticeable than an insect’ (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 43).

### **Traversing the fundamental fantasy: Jim’s jump as ethical act**

With the ethical framework of imperial capitalism elucidated, Jim’s conversation with Marlow about his own jump can be read in starkly different terms to the conventional critical perspective of an unequivocal moral failing, and, in fact, can be alternatively interpreted as an ethical breakthrough. Before his jump is analysed in terms of the Lacanian act, one must clarify and resolve any ambiguity regarding the interpretation of the events leading up to Jim’s leap from the *Patna*.

From the perspective of a universal ethics—or perhaps a Judeo-Christian ethics that emphasises the sanctity of life—the system of imperial capitalism that Jim works in might be seen as unethical in and of itself. This approach may then imply that his jump is somehow an

ethical undertaking as it could be considered a rejection of an unethical system – if viewed from this universal perspective. The captain's reduction of humans to the level of 'cattle', Brierly's equivalence between 'rags' and 'pilgrims' and Marlow's own designation of young recruits as 'stuff' all suggest a certain ruthlessness or callousness at work in the imperial project. Considered in this context, the impossibility of Jim's situation might garner sympathy and support this approach as he is faced with an impossible scenario to resolve. As Marlow listens, it quickly becomes clear that the situation Jim is in is impossible to manage safely – as he relates the 'only distinct thought formed, vanishing, and re-forming in his brain, was: eight hundred people and seven boats' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 55).

However, from a Lacanian perspective, the very possibility of a universal ethical position is itself undermined. As Lacan unambiguously states, there is no 'Sovereign good' or immutable point at which one can unequivocally fix the meaning of good or evil. Lacan rejects the existence of a 'particular [moral] order [that] is unified with a more universal knowledge [and] cosmic order' (*Ethics* 22). He regards this question as 'closed. Not only doesn't [the psychoanalyst] have that Sovereign Good that is asked of him, but he also knows there isn't any' (300). Rather, good and evil can only be conceived of in regards to the dominant moral code of a given symbolic order, which in Lacanian thought is morality *per se*. The Lacanian ethical act can only be conceptualised as a radical evil that transgresses this dominant moral code, so that a '[t]ransgression in the direction of *jouissance* only takes place if it is supported by the oppositional principle, by the forms of the Law' (177). In this case it would be a transgression of the moral law practised within and endorsed by imperial and colonial ideology; a system where the service of goods is commensurate with the common good. So any possible consideration of Jim's jump being acceptable in terms of a universal ethics that illuminates the moral failings of imperial capitalism can be discarded on the two counts. Firstly, Lacan rejects a universal, fixed position of goodness, and, secondly, the Lacanian ethical act is such because it is the transgression of a dominant moral code within a

particular socio-symbolic system. Accordingly, if any universal ethical considerations do exist, they are of a secondary importance to the definition of a Lacanian act and are of a diminished relevance to my reading. It is clear that Lacan avoids 'proposing anything like a universal ethics' (Freeman 242) as, in his view, this kind of process 'culminate[s] in philosophical absolutist articulations' (242). Instead, the 'ethics of psychoanalysis shall only be concerned with the particular, [and] the individual' (242-43).

Returning to the text, it is suggestive that Marlow feels distinctly unsettled by Jim's revelations and reveals this sensation through a tropology of light and dark, in which he suggests that Jim has experienced an 'obscure truth[,] momentous enough to affect mankind's conception of itself' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 59). He states that Jim's experience appeals to 'the side [of us] turned perpetually to the light of day, and to that side of us, which like the other hemisphere of the moon, exists stealthily in perpetual darkness, with only a fearful ashy light falling at times on the edge' (59). Paul Kintzele suggests that 'light seems to be a simple trope for rational knowledge' (70) and it is this 'rational' light in which Marlow is constantly figured as existing within. Yet it is his awareness, which is hinted at here, of that other region—of other ethical and subjective possibilities not of the normative moral code and the dominant ideology—which supports his position as a transitional figure in the narrative. Whilst he cannot integrate these truths on a subjective level, he is, at least, aware of them. (Further, it is no coincidence that the later climes of Patusan are figured in the same tropology of darkness, as Paccaud-Huguet notes, where Patusan's 'moonlit landscapes make darkness visible' ("Sublime" 162). Even Stein's advice for living is articulated from within a similar darkness – in a Lacanian sense, these imagistic reverberations are the *extimate* suggestion of *das Ding* and a space of non-rational knowledge).

It is at this juncture in the narrative that the Lacanian ethical act becomes identifiable, an act that can only be comprehended as a transgression of normative morality and appropriately imaged by Conrad as shrouded in darkness. At this stage an increase of

imagery suggestive of a textual void *qua das Ding* is identifiable. There is the ‘grasp of the abyss’ (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 61), and an ‘abyss of obscurity’ (64) proximally located in this sequence (Paccaud-Huguet, “Sublime” 159), as well as an intensification of imagery reflective of religious transgression – evidenced in ‘infernal powers’ (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 68), an ‘infernal joke’ (69) and a ‘tale of black magic’ (69). From a Lacanian standpoint, this is certainly suggestive of the ethical act viewable as only a ‘radical evil’ in conventional moral terms. Jim’s jump becomes the Lacanian ethical act as it fractures his symbolic identity and enables an encounter with the real *qua das Ding*. The jump has no positive textual depiction – it is not directly narrated, thus attesting to its status in the real, and is noticeable only due to its textual absence from the tale, as Jim explains “‘I had jumped...It seems” [and] “I knew nothing about it till I looked up”” (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 70). There is no conscious agency in this action, proceeding as it does from a subjective point beyond that of the symbolic. Žižek offers a succinct explanation of the act that assists in its designation, and the identification of its structural effects within *Lord Jim*. It is where

the subject is annihilated and subsequently reborn (or not), i.e. the act involves a kind of temporary eclipse, or *aphanisis*, of the subject [...] by the means of it I put at stake everything, including myself, my symbolic identity; the act is therefore always a “crime”, a “transgression”, namely of the limit of the symbolic community to which I belong. (Žižek, *Enjoy* 51)

The absence of Jim’s conscious identity during the jump is suggestive of this ‘*aphanisis*’, or ‘eclipse’, of the subject, and it is this action of the jump that transgresses his symbolic obligation as a merchant officer. The idea of a subject’s physical movement becoming an act is expressly stated by Lacan. He asserts that ‘if one day [my action] is to cross a certain threshold by which I put myself outside the law [then] that day my motor activity will have the value of an act’ (Lacan, *Psychoanalytic Act* 5), and Jim passing beyond the ‘threshold’ of the *Patna* clearly reflects this concept. His act also represents an abjuration of his father’s

installation of him into the symbolic order. The nature of Jim's explicit declaration that he would 'never go home now' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 50) to Marlow can be interpreted as more than just ostensible shame, which is Marlow's immediate inference. It could also be seen as a burgeoning conscious resolution disavowing the ideological heritage of his father.

It is through his jump that Jim enacts an ethical breakthrough. Commensurate to this ethical dimension, it also enables him to traverse the fundamental fantasy. It is a moment that 'transforms a subject's complacent "'subjection"' to the Other' (Pluth 98), as Jim rejects the ideological strictures espoused by his father and the symbolic system into which he was installed. As Alenka Zupančič observes, traversing the fantasy 'is a step which can be taken only from "'inside"' this fantasy[.] Lacan remarks, to go beyond the fantasy, it is not enough to know it and speak of it from a distance' (*Ethics Real* 232). The Lacanian ethical act must be 'accomplished in the frame of the subject's fundamental fantasy' (244). Clearly, the crisis aboard the *Patna* appears to offer these very fantasmatic coordinates that would enable Jim to become a hero in the manner he dreams of previously in the text. Here, in the absolute epicentre of this fantasmatic frame, Jim's action, from a Lacanian perspective, enacts the momentous first step of eviscerating his subjectivity as that of a subject of desire—primarily determined by the Other—and opens up the possibility of becoming a subject of drive. Indeed, 'what is at stake [in the act] is nothing other than this very frame [of the fundamental fantasy], [so the subject] ends up "'outside"' the fantasy, in another field: that of drive' (244-45). The manner in which Lacan describes this precise moment is uncannily suggestive of Jim's jump. Lacan specifically refers to the subject's 'fall from his [or her] fantasy' which makes the individual 'destitute as a subject' ("Proposition" 6) in terms of his or her former symbolic identity.

At this very moment, Conrad accordingly dissipates the spatial and moral certainties previously asserted by the *Patna* and the Cartesian world in which it journeyed, as Jim 's[ees] just one yellow gleam of the masthead light high up and blurred like a last star ready to

dissolve' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 71) recalling the earlier homology between the *Patna* and the cosmological coordinates of its world. While Jim is in the life boat, Conrad's description further highlights how bereft his subjectivity is of the fabric of his former symbolic situation; he is 'in black, too – all black. Not a star, not a light anywhere' (74). Jim's jump is 'into an everlasting deep hole' (71) – a consequence of the Lacanian act and encounter with the real qua *das Ding*. Of course, a consideration must be made that obviously the *Patna* did not sink and was subsequently discovered by the French naval vessel that towed it back to Aden. This plot device can be viewed in two ways commensurate with a Lacanian ethical reading. Firstly, had Jim stayed on board and been recovered it merely would have confirmed his fantasy outlined earlier in the novel and cemented Jim as sailor-hero of the merchant navy. Further, the revelation that the crew abandoned the *Patna* necessitates the symbolic function of the tribunal with its ensuing moral judgments about Jim. By demanding to stand trial, Jim completes the act of 'symbolic suicide' (Žižek, *Enjoy* 50) started when he jumps from the *Patna* and ensures the evisceration of his symbolic identity. He is fully aware that standing trial would ensure his officer's certificate 'gone, career broken [and] no work that he could obtain as far as he could see' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 51) and yet does it anyway. It is in connection with this last point that the second aspect of Žižek's conception of the act can be explored – the 'rebirth' of the subject. In order to trace this movement in *Lord Jim*, it is first necessary to refer to Cathy Caruth's theorisation of trauma to more deeply identify and elucidate the coordinates of Jim's experience.

### **The consequences of the act: Jim's jump as trauma**

Bereft of his former subjectivity having undergone the Lacanian ethical act, Jim finds himself unmoored from his previous symbolic coordinates. Suggestively, the nature of the rupture with the socio-symbolic Other that constitutes an act is described in terms denoting a

traumatic subjective experience, given the subject's 'traumatic encounter with the Real' (Žižek, *Enjoy* 91) that is inherent in the act itself.

Therefore, in light of these qualities of the Lacanian act, it is appropriate to consider Cathy Caruth's theorisation of trauma, offering as it does a psychoanalytic model that can both identify and analyse the formal qualities of Jim's jump from the *Patna*. The application of trauma theory will focus not only upon the precise moment of the jump but also its subsequent psychical impact on Conrad's depiction of Jim's subjectivity – both in terms of his retelling of the events to Marlow and Jim's behavior following the judgment of the tribunal. Further, the framework of trauma will also reveal the consequences that the crisis entails for the imperial socio-symbolic order.

It must be noted that the usage of Caruth's model entails a development of the Lacanian model that is predominant in my reading. However, her work is strongly informed by Lacan's ideas regarding trauma and the subject, and their conceptual affinity, given their respective Freudian indebtedness, is clearly evident. Indeed, Lacan's own conception of the subject's encounter with the real *vis-a-vis* the ethical act is delineated in terms explicitly suggestive of Caruth's model of traumatic experience – not least in regards to a temporal rupture and an absence of a directly depicted textual presence. This conceptual relationship is one which Žižek's own ideologically inflected model of analysis supports and develops.

Before an analysis of Conrad's portrayal of Jim's recollections with Marlow, the structural qualities of trauma must be established. Caruth asserts that an inherent structural attribute of trauma is an impossibility of the subject in experiencing the traumatic event at the moment of its occurrence. She argues that 'trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in the individual's past, but rather in the way [...] it was precisely not known in the first instance [and] returns to haunt the survivor later on' (Caruth 4). This notion of its 'unassimilated nature' (4) keenly resonates with the textual structure of Jim's leap from the *Patna*. Jim's jump is not directly depicted by Conrad and has no explicit presence in the novel,

thus attesting not only to its traumatic quality but also to its location in the real as discussed previously in the chapter. More tellingly, however, Caruth designates the formal indices of the traumatic encounter as distinctly temporal in nature. Trauma is a 'wound of the mind – the breach in the mind's experience of time, self and the world' (4), where this breach of time entails a break in the subject's sense of self and experience of its environment. This temporal dimension is one that is foregrounded in Conrad's delineation of Jim's jump. Beyond the absence of conscious awareness—as Jim states, 'I knew nothing about it till I looked up' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 70) echoing Caruth's notion of trauma being 'precisely not known in the first instance'—there is a marked shift in grammatical tense between past and present. This shift signals a rupture in the temporal experience of the subject. Jim remarks that "'I had jumped..." He checked himself, averted his gaze..."It seems," he added' (70). This can be aligned with Caruth's conceptualisation of trauma as being 'locatable not in one moment alone but in the relation between two moments' (133). The traumatic experience is identifiable by its 'temporal unlocatability' and the textual structure of Jim's jump appears to operate in a commensurate manner to this aspect of the trauma model.

Yet, given its 'unassimilated nature' at the time of the event, further qualities must be identified for the full implications of Caruth's model to be convincingly demonstrated. Here, Žižek's own notion of the real and its relation to trauma can be connected with Caruth's theory. As the trauma cannot be known at the time of its occurrence, it must reside in a period of '*latency*[,] during which the effects of the experience are not apparent [*italics in original*]' (Caruth 17). This latency of the trauma could explain Marlow's observations that Jim appears utterly carefree when he is first spotted with the rest of the crew—'[h]e had no business to look so sound' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 26)—and his subsequent calmness during the public tribunal and questioning by Brierly. It is arguable that the effects of the trauma were not yet known to Jim. The process by which this encounter with the real is re-awakened is explained by Žižek in terms suggestive of a traumatic experience, where 'the crucial role of



contingent encounters [triggers] a traumatic crackup of our psychic balance: overhearing a passing remark by a friend, witnessing a small unpleasant scene [-] the unconscious trauma repeats itself *by means of* some small, contingent bit of reality [italics in original]' (*Enjoy* 14). This comment might explain the circumstances of Jim's and Marlow's first encounter. The 'contingent bit of reality' appears to be Marlow's companion's fateful reference to 'that wretched cur' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 44) of a dog, which Jim mistakes as a reference to himself as the three men leave the tribunal. This chance moment sets off the experience of the psychological trauma for Jim as he responds with the possibility of 'maturing violence' and a 'tone suggestive of crisis' (46) when Marlow attempts to placate him. As Žižek notes, if not this moment, then another contingent piece of reality will eventually 'fire off the trauma' (*Enjoy* 14), as 'I don't recognize myself in [this event] because I'm its addressee, I become its addressee the moment I recognize myself in it' (14). The comment was obviously not directed at Jim, but his self-recognition operates in accordance with the moral code that the tribunal prosecutes him through and makes him see himself in the meaningless reference to the stray dog.

This chance encounter instigates the process of Jim actually undergoing the traumatic effects of the *Patna* crisis when he later dines with Marlow. Of course, it is an experience that is structurally precluded from the subject during the initial occurrence of the traumatic event. In its most general sense, Caruth categorises trauma and its after-effects as that of 'an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the events occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena' (11). The trauma is only experienced afterwards in the 'repetitive actions of the survivor' (4). This frame of reference for the symptoms of trauma resonates with Conrad's description of Jim following the *Patna* crisis. Specifically, the symptoms are visible in his pained, horrific reliving of the crisis during his conversations with Marlow, which are in stark contrast to the alert, focused awareness he exhibits during the sequence in the

life-boat with the crew of the *Patna*. During the dinner, Jim clearly displays 'delayed, uncontrolled' reactions. Marlow observes Jim exhibit a spectrum of reactions that attest to the traumatic impact the *Patna* crisis has had upon him. The start of Jim's recollection begins to suggest these 'intrusive phenomena', as Jim 'dart[s] his arm across the tablecloth [and] burst[s] out in a muffled voice' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 50). Conrad portrays his countenance as quickly shifting from being placid to appearing deeply troubled. At first, Jim's expression offers a 'strange look of beatitude' (53). Suddenly, his eyes appear 'amazed and full of pain, with a bewildered, startled, suffering face' (53). Marlow remarks that the young sailor seems to be going 'through it again while he [is] telling me these things' (55) – as if he is reliving the circumstances of the crisis. Jim's behavior is noted for its 'subtle unsoundness' (57), where he bangs his fist on the table and keeps 'staring anxiously' (57) at Marlow, actions which culminate in his hysterical laughter which arrests the attention of all of the couple's fellow diners. As Jim explains the event, Marlow notes that he 'seem[s] to probe the heart of some awful vision' (63), as if Jim's present consciousness is eclipsed by reliving the trauma. Whilst not wholly indicative of a hallucination, Conrad's description of Jim as he nears the climax of the tale certainly resonates with Caruth's reference to 'intrusive phenomena'. Jim is shown to 'dr[aw] quick breaths and sh[oot] quick glances' at Marlow's face, and appears to be 'not speaking to [Marlow]' but 'only speaking before [him], in a dispute with an invisible personality' (59). This 'vision' and 'invisible personality' attests to the overwhelming after-effects of the trauma – effects impossible to process during the initial experience itself.

What the application of trauma theory further clarifies is the repetitive pattern of behaviour that defines Jim in the period following the tribunal's judgment and cancellation of his certificate. Caruth refers to the concept of repetition compulsion which may help explain Jim's actions. This concept reveals how 'consciousness, once faced with the possibility of its death, can do nothing but repeat the destructive event over and over again' (Caruth 63). Indeed, the return of this traumatic experience is necessitated by the inability of the subject

to experience it in the first place, by the 'missing of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced in time, it has not yet been fully known' (62). This imperative is what dictates Jim's actions as he becomes a ship's chandler after the loss of his officer status; the 'destructive repetition of the trauma' (63) directs his mindlessly reckless methods of discharging his duties amid terrible sailing conditions. Marlow's conversation with Blake, the partner in the supply firm of Egstrom and Blake that briefly employs Jim, reveals this traumatic imperative in operation. Blake labels Jim a 'regular devil for sailing a boat' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 121) who works in any weather conditions. Most convincing are the references made by the captains of the incoming vessels who see Jim as 'a reckless sort of a lunatic' and 'more like a demon than a man' (121) – one who blatantly disregards dangerous conditions at sea in order to reach a potential client. That Jim's assistants remain 'frightened' (121) on the bottom of the boat testifies to the folly of Jim's behaviour and suggests traumatic repetition at work. This idea is reinforced by the captain's observation that the ships were in a 'squall' (121) when Jim comes to meet them – the same conditions that engulfed the *Patna* when Jim leapt from it. Jim's own departure from Blake and his repeated departure from the other companies he briefly engages with also resonate with the imperative of repetition as a means of dealing with the trauma.

What is especially striking about Caruth's model is the implication of historical possibility that trauma enacts, and how the expression of trauma functions on an inter-subjective level. Caruth makes an observation regarding Freud's journey to England from Austria in the build-up to the Second World War. She states that Freud's own voice 'emerges [...] as a departure' (Caruth 23) which addresses another subject, in this case Freud's family. A similarity could be drawn between Jim's voice and Freud's. Jim's voice, directed at Marlow, also articulates a departure – from the merchant navy and its attendant commercial enterprises. Indeed, it can be considered that 'history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas' (24). The very

retelling of Jim's story to Marlow implicates Marlow himself, and the subsequent multiple retellings by Marlow to his own audiences of listeners enact this very process of the 'formation of history as the endless repetition of previous violence' (63).

This inter-subjective structure amplifies the effects of trauma beyond its localised impact upon Jim's own subjectivity, into the effects of the traumatic event upon the broader symbolic order. Whilst originating within and around Jim, the event of the dereliction of the *Patna* functions as a trauma to the wider symbolic order of the merchant navy itself. As Paul Crosthwaite argues

trauma is always inter-subjective [...] because it manifests itself as damage to the symbolic order, which constitutes the subject and in which the subject is embedded. The injury done to the symbolic order at the level of the subject will, in many cases, ripple out from the site of the trauma to disturb the wider symbolic network. (*Trauma* 25)

This process is evident not only in the effects upon Marlow himself as recipient of the tale—his profound questioning of the moral values involved—but more widely in the damage done to the appearance of imperial prestige and moral authority. It can be detected not only in the damage to the community at Aden but also in the speed at which the news travels, as Marlow notes, to the newspapers in England. The disturbance to the imperial symbolic order is clearly articulated through the figure of Brierly in his dialogue with Marlow, where he seeks to efface the affair from social consciousness by suggesting Jim's flight from the tribunal. Most important, however, is the extent to which the damage is retroactively assimilated, as 'the most prominent measure of the symbolic damage wrought by any historical event is the extent to which ideological resources have been mobilized to domesticate, cover over, or "suture" its impact' (Crosthwaite, *Trauma* 26). An obvious manifestation of this process, in addition to Brierly's machinations aiming to "cover over" the crisis, is the socio-symbolic

function of the official tribunal – an apt example of the domestication of imperialist failings that the *Patna* event highlighted. The shortcomings of the imperial symbolic are quickly elided. This elision obviates an analysis of the deeper, inherent failings of capitalist ideology and its commercial enterprise as the tribunal is established for the sole purpose of maintaining the ideological *status quo*.

The framework of trauma theory exposes the harrowing consequences of the *Patna* crisis both at the more expansive ideological level of the imperialist symbolic order and upon the individual subjectivity of Jim himself. Desperately trying to come to terms with the trauma, Jim enacts a pattern of destructive repetition born of the structural necessity that defines trauma and it is only through the final, desperate intervention of Marlow that Jim's pathological sequence is broken, enabling his consequent 'rebirth' in Patusan. It is the merchant, Stein, who facilitates this subjective movement. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Stein enables Jim's consolidation of the subjective possibilities made available by the Lacanian act. Further, he assists in Jim's repositioning from a constricted subject of desire—still subordinated to the desire of the Other—to the subject of drive which offers possible satisfaction and enjoyment of *jouissance*.

### **The subject of Stein, the subject of drive**

Conrad's figuration of Stein appears to function, as many critics have argued, as an exemplification of the aspirations Jim articulates at the start of the novel. Accordingly, he is simply an idealisation of the character type found in the romance genre: adventurer, lover and commercial success. As Terry Collits notes, Stein was largely based on the historical personage Alfred Russel Wallace, that 'famous orientalist' (137), and he equates Stein with Wallace as both 'lived in an era that combined science with adventure' (137). Collits' perspective chimes with the frequently cited critical view of Stein and the subsequent

Patusan section of *Lord Jim* as Conrad's attempt to 'write a modern-day romance' which 'evokes the afterglow of romantic desire for an imaginary lost world where "'glamour'" is still possible' (138). His reference to this narrative movement as a 'lapse into romance' (137) echoes the dominant negative critical view of the Patusan section as generic formality, or, more likely, artistic inferiority. This view, however, represents a significant undervaluation of both the figure and function of Stein. It is from a Lacanian perspective that Stein may be exonerated and seen as constituting the embryonic subject of drive – the subjective configuration that enables the subject to enjoy the satisfaction of *jouissance*. This is a structure that finds its fullest expression later in the figure of Jim after he follows Stein's counsel.

Lacan refers to the 'subject who has traversed the radical [or fundamental] phantasy' and can now 'experience the drive' (*Four Concepts* 273). Indeed, the very possibility of a subject's 'access to the drive [...] opens only when the subject has already traversed the "'fundamental fantasy'" (Zupančič, *Ethics Real* 239). It is through the ethical act that Jim undergoes during the crisis aboard the *Patna*, and the tribunal which eviscerates his symbolic identity, that he is then confronted with what Zupančič asserts as the fundamental Lacanian ethical question. This is 'the question forced upon us by an encounter with the Real: will I act in conformity with what threw me out of joint [and] will I be ready to reformulate what has hitherto been the foundation of my existence?' (235). Following the ethical act, the rupture with morality *per se*, Lacan's ethics necessitates a choice for the subject. Jim has undergone a subjective *aphanisis* and become stripped of his symbolic identity. And, as seen through the theory of trauma, he then struggles to affirm the freedom accorded to him through the encounter with the real. It is Stein that enables Jim to accede to the subject position of drive and consolidate the ethical potential of his act.

Appropriately, the character of Stein exhibits subjective traits that are clearly demonstrative of drive, as 'in contrast to desire, the drive sustains itself on the very fact it is

satisfied' (Zupančič, *Ethics Real* 242). The adventurer's recollections of his past accord with this notion. Stein recalls how he kills a number of assailants that are hunting him and immediately afterwards discovers a rare butterfly specimen. He tells Marlow how he 'had dreamed of [the butterfly] in my sleep' and now 'suddenly I had him in my fingers – for myself!' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 132). Crucially, he then reflects upon a quality which is deeply suggestive of the subject of drive – that of subjective satisfaction. He states how on 'that day I had nothing to desire; I had greatly annoyed my principal enemy; I was young, strong; I had friendship [...] and even what I had once dreamed in my sleep had come into my hand' (132). Ian Watt observes that with the introduction of Stein, 'events, characters, themes, and narrative devices all converge to propel *Lord Jim* into a single and unchecked forward movement to its end' (305). While Watt is somewhat derisive of what this entails, this shift to a more linear narrative here could equally be seen as an exemplification of the Lacanian movement of drive itself. Žižek refers to the unimpeded 'self-enclosure of drive's circuit and its [...] satisfaction' (*Ticklish Subject* 296), where one of the constituent elements of drive is its unbroken movement – in contrast to the constantly shifting, irregular metonymy of desire which operates according to the principle of substitution.

Even the framework of Stein's and Marlow's encounter echoes that of a psychoanalytic setting. Their discussion concerning Jim is delimited as a 'medical consultation' (*Lord Jim* 133) by Conrad, or, more evocatively as Paul Kintzele notes, the 'atmosphere of a consultation [...] in which the thickly-accented Stein plays a role not unlike that of Freud' (72). This comparison is strikingly suggestive, even more so as he notices that Stein's butterfly cases resemble 'Freud's prominent display of ancient artifacts in his own consulting room' (72). Most compelling, however, is the analysis of the means of delivery of Stein's advice to Marlow regarding Jim. Kintzele observes here that 'light seems to be a simple trope for rational knowledge' (73) as Stein's advice comes when he is 'passing out of the bright circle of the lamp [...] into shapeless dusk at last. It ha[s] an odd effect – as if these

few steps [carry] him out of this concrete and perplexed world' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 132). That it is from 'this obscurity that Stein delivers his enigmatic solution to the problem of "'how to be'"' (Kintzele 73) is telling. Not only does it suggest, as Kintzele argues, that Stein appears momentarily able 'to speak from, or for, the unconscious' (73) but the substantive quality that Marlow invokes in contrast—that of the 'concrete' world—recalls by contrast the secure, calibrated world-view so dominant in Conrad's earlier depiction of the *Patna's* voyage.

Further, the imagery of light and dark is repeatedly imbricated throughout the text to articulate spatial and subjective separation from the dominant imperial symbolic order. After Jim leaps overboard, he and the crew are lost in 'pitchy blackness' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 71) with everything 'black' (71) and not 'a star, not a light anywhere' (74), reflecting the dissolution of the geometrical and rational framework governing and constituting the space of the socio-symbolic with its attendant morality in service of its commercialism. It is beyond these spatial coordinates that Stein articulates the subjective movement necessary for Jim in his famous pronouncement, where the 'way is to in the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up' (134). Here, I would agree with Kintzele, as he asserts that submitting to this 'destructive element' is to 'become the subject of the drive, to renounce the metonymy of desire, the chimerical hope for transcendence or fulfillment, for a self-destructive consistency' (73). It is feasible to identify this 'destructive element' as, in fact, *jouissance*. It is within and through *jouissance* that the subject of the drive enacts its satisfaction, and the subject's encounter with the real *qua jouissance* is repeatedly categorised as a traumatic or destructive experience. Indeed, Jacques-Alain Miller states unequivocally that '*jouissance* in itself is a certain destruction' (qtd. in Johnson 237).

The opportunity afforded by Stein to Jim in Patusan is appropriately introduced via a spatial topology wholly incommensurate with the earlier depiction of Cartesian space that Conrad utilises in and around the *Patna*. Whereas the *Patna* is posited as 'everlastingly in



[the] centre' of the 'circular stillness' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 12) of water—occupying a triumphant centrality in that 'strictly uniform mathematical world' (Koyré, *Closed World* 100)—the space of Patusan is juxtaposed as an astronomical anomaly. It is, in contrast, likened to a body out of alignment with the governing scientific system. Marlow refers to it as being of 'no earthly importance to anybody but to the astronomers who are paid to talk learnedly about its composition, weight, path – the irregularities of its conduct, the aberrations of its light – a sort of scientific scandal-mongering' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 137). Its 'irregularities', 'aberrations' and very 'scandal' testify to its space as quantifiably irreconcilable to the known, mapped and traversed space of capitalist imperialism. This is a space that Conrad presents as unbounded by conventional Cartesian coordinates—'outside of the sphere of [the earth's] activities' (136)—which, in a Lacanian sense, appropriately accords with the different subjective structure inherent in the subject of drive. It is interesting that Marlow is fully aware that he is using metaphoric language to describe Patusan—'neither heavenly bodies nor astronomers have anything to do with [it]' (137)—but it appears as if he is unable to speak of Patusan in any other terms. He immediately relapses back into metaphor when he continues his description of events: 'had Stein arranged to send him into a star of the fifth magnitude the change could not have been greater. He left his earthly failings behind him' (137). It is as if the different symbolic order into which Jim is re-constituted as subject of drive is only conceivable through reference to an aberration within the governing cosmological system, or, perhaps, a different cosmology altogether. The only alternative that Marlow can invoke is particularly telling – he describes Patusan as a 'grave for some sin, transgression, or misfortune' (137). These terms recall how the Lacanian act can only be understood as a transgression from the point of view of the normative morality of the dominant symbolic order.

Marlow's reference to Stein's visits to Patusan resonate with the ideological imperatives at work in the imperial symbolic order. This is the system that Marlow is

constituted within and which, as previously detected, has a system of morality that is coextensive with the commercial concerns of capitalism. Marlow speaks of Patusan, amongst other places in the Archipelago, 'before light (and even electric light) [has] been carried into them for the sake of better morality and – and – well – the greater profit, too' (137). Here is the overt acknowledgement that space is illuminated, configured and mapped by a model of perception that is inextricable from a morality serving the profit motive of capitalism. This is the rational perception that illuminates the *Patna* and the 'concrete' world that Stein had to step out of in order to articulate new subjective possibilities. It is a light that transforms space into that which, as Coroneos remarks, becomes 'homogenous, infinitely divisible[,] enveloping the earth (29). That the light in Patusan becomes a 'mournful eclipse-like light' (qtd. in Paccaud-Huguet, "Sublime" 162), and is associated with the pulsation of drive which behaves in ways markedly different to the commercial imperial order, is fitting for the subjective structure Jim consequently embodies.

### **Patusan: Jim's rebirth as subject of drive**

As explored earlier, the common critical refrain that greets the Patusan episode of *Lord Jim* is that Conrad simply grants Jim a form of his romantic dreams that he luxuriates in during both his officer training and fateful voyage on the steamship, and that this narrative shift results in a clear 'disparity in the structure' (Watt 308) of the novel. Ian Watt is damning in his assessment of Jim's actions in Patusan as simply being the 'romantic schoolboy adventures that they essentially are if they were subjected to the extended and rigorous cross-examination which is applied to Jim's desertion of the *Patna*' (308). This not only marginalizes the content of the episode but also denotes a 'reduction in the density of the narrative texture' (306) – condemning the Patusan section on both counts of style and substance. The infamous comment Conrad himself made in a letter, regarding this transition

as a 'plague spot' in the novel (qtd. in Watt 308), seemingly cements its reputation as a decline in *Lord Jim's* artistic cohesion. Yet, what if Conrad's designation of Patusan as a textual 'plague spot' is instead interpreted at face value in a Lacanian light – a light informed by the very light of Patusan itself, as a 'grave to sin, transgression, or misfortune'? Could it be seen rather as the site of expulsion of the Antigone-like subject which "plagues" the dominant symbolic; the subject who has 'accepted the role of the excremental object' (Žižek, *Ticklish Subject* 296) following the subjective evisceration of the ethical act? If so, Watt's line of criticism can be thus refuted through a Lacanian reading. One must then focus upon the subjective implications that are entailed by the ethical act and subsequent restructuration of the subject from subject of desire to subject of drive.

Jim's failure to adapt to life as a ship's chandler can further be explained in concert with Zupančič's question of 'will I be ready to reformulate what has hitherto been the foundation of my existence?' (*Ethics Real* 235) – the fundamental ethical question necessitated by the Lacanian act. Clearly, by cleaving to the same imperial commercial symbolic that he was excluded from—the merchant navy—albeit in a different position as that of supplier, Jim up to this point fails to reconfigure his subjectivity accordingly. It is only through Stein's and Marlow's suggestion to Jim that 'once he got in[to Patusan], it would be as though he had never existed' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 145) that the opportunity for 'reformulating' his subjectivity becomes available. Jim confirms this choice with his reaction—'[n]ever existed – that's it, by Jove!' (146)—which, in Lacanian terms, is indicative of the opportunity afforded by symbolic suicide. The subject must embrace a new subjective structure. It is an opportunity which, if he 'accepts[,] the subject comes out of this choice as "'another subject'" – or, more precisely, it is only after this choice that the subject is a subject' (Zupančič, *Ethics Real* 235) – vindicating the ethical possibility the Lacanian act presents.

Before engaging with the figuration of Jim's subjectivity in Patusan, it is first crucial to

more fully consider Conrad's depiction of the topological qualities of the region. This consideration is due to the subjective possibilities Patusan offers and its profound difference to the space of the dominant socio-symbolic from which Jim departs. Through its spatial depiction, juxtaposed to the Cartesian, substantive and quantifiable space of the imperial symbolic, Patusan is lit with the 'ghost of dead sunlight' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 154), which 'robs all forms of matter – which, after all, is our domain – of their substance, and gives a sinister reality to shadows alone' (154). The reference to diminishing 'matter' and the insubstantial quality of Patusan's tangible reality is in contrast to Marlow's own 'domain', that of a rational, scientific normative space. Patusan's space is configured differently to the mapped rational space of the imperial enterprise. What was intricately calibrated and mechanistic in the commercial symbolic now becomes a space of 'vague, grey, silvery forms mingled with black masses of shadow' (154). Just as much as Jim previously, as subject of desire, was constituted within an imperial symbolic space—as if that configuration of space prescribed a certain subjective structure—so too does this new composition of symbolic reality enable a different form of subjectivity to function. In this case it is the subject of drive – as Russell Grigg claims, a 'new symbolic network entails the “death” of the old and the “birth” of a new subject' (122).

This divergence of the composition of symbolic space between rational Cartesian space and the space of Patusan—functioning as a cosmological 'aberration'—and its implications for the structure of the subject perhaps finds its fullest expression when Marlow leaves Jim for the last time later in the novel. Marlow's response to his departure reveals the constitutive difference between these symbolic spaces. It is, for Marlow, as if someone 'lift[s] a heavy curtain' and flings 'open an immense portal' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 207) when he reaches the outer edge of Patusan. The structure of Marlow's own subjectivity appears aligned and calibrated to the mapped, traversable space of the imperial symbolic that lies beyond. He 'revel[s] in the vastness of the open horizon', where the sky and sea are 'open' to him and

where his eyes 'could roam through space' (207) in a perceptual clarity denied by the shadowy, spectral phenomena of Patusan. He is further likened to a man stretching from cramped, claustrophobic conditions and tellingly at this moment Marlow positively 'respond[s] with every fibre of [his] being' (207) to this spatial shift, in contrast to the dense, murky psychic space of drive that constitutes Patusan. Again this depiction of imperial space is demarcated as coextensive with a morality subservient to commercial concerns. Marlow refers to the landscape outside Patusan as 'glorious' in a subtly religious tone, and refers to Jim, the 'sinner' (207), avoiding looking at it 'as if afraid to see writ large on the clear sky of the offing the reproach of his romantic conscience' (207). Appropriately, Jim sees this physical point as 'my limit' (208) and declares, in concert with his subjective suicide and rejection of his previous symbolic coordinates, that he has 'nothing' (210) to relate back to the outside world.

Watt's criticism of Jim's 'romantic schoolboy adventures' in Patusan—his defeat of Sherif Ali, vanquishing of the assassins, his veritable adoption by Doramin and elevated position of authority—can be rejected through consideration of a further aspect of the Lacanian act. Another implication that can be discerned in the act is how 'signifiers do not necessarily produce meanings that one wishes to have recognized by the Other' (Pluth 98). What could therefore be initially dismissed as mere schoolboy adventure becomes, in this Lacanian context, a sophisticated realignment of signifying potential used in negation of the Other. Jim uses those signifiers that are present in his fundamental fantasy at the novel's start—such as "adventure" and "heroism"—to produce meanings that do not require the recognition of the imperialist socio-symbolic order. Rather than subordinating them to what Ross designates the *point de capiton* of 'duty' inherent in the ideology of the imperial enterprise espoused by his father, Jim reconstitutes the signifiers on his own terms and the terms of the new symbolic Other of Patusan within which he is embedded. In this aspect of an act, 'signifiers are used quasi-autonomously, and their use amounts to a repetition[.]

converting an enigmatic tension into some kind of satisfaction' (98). Jim's actions reflect this quasi-autonomy: the signifiers of heroism and adventure, the initial fantasmatic coordinates, are utilised in a repetition—this is their second appearance following the novel's start—but without need to be 'recognised by the [imperial] Other' (98). This process might also be present in the linguistic similarity identifiable in the signifiers *Patna* and Patusan, where Jim perhaps reconfigures the signifier *Patna* to enable him to enjoy 'some kind of satisfaction' – a state that is clearly visible during his initial period in Patusan.

This process is further evident in Marlow's recognition of Jim's new symbolic identity, when he notices that a native 'call[s] him Tuan Jim, and the tone of his references [i]s made remarkable by a strange mixture of familiarity and awe' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 152). This usage of the signifier 'tuan'—"lord" in translation—reflects the Lacanian concept of a 'new' signifier generated through the radical effects of the act. Pluth views the prospect as more specifically the usage of a signifier 'that is not bound up with the production of meanings already recognisable by the Other' (105) and that '[w]hat may well have been new about the signifiers involved [is] the way in which they [are] used' (106). Jim's acceptance of the titular 'tuan' reflects a new subjective position which negates the dominant symbolic of the imperial project and accedes to the different symbolic order operant in Patusan. Grigg's nuanced interpretation of the Lacanian act is relevant as he argues that in an act 'freedom may be free relative to a given symbolic order. This of course makes freedom relative rather than absolute—relative to a particular form, or determination, of the Other. It will be free from *its* strictures [and] criminal in *its* eyes [italics in original]' (131). Following this we can see that Jim's new symbolic identity is therefore constituted through a different symbolic system. Indeed, his rejection of the imperial, rational system is keenly discernible when, imprisoned in Tunka Allang's compound, he is given a watch to repair and it is at this moment when 'thus occupied in his shed [...] the true perception of his extreme peril dawn[s] on him' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 158) and he flees to Doramin's camp. As Randall Stevenson notes, in Conrad there

are marked 'equations of crisis and clockwork' (43) which are more thoroughly investigated later in *The Secret Agent* but here reflect Jim's rejection of the mechanised, imperial system which he has left behind.

Jim's advent as subject of drive is thus discernible through examination of his subjectivity as constituted through and within the alternative symbolic order of Patusan. Žižek's reference to the domain of drive as 'the enigmatic "'dark continent'" of drive and its satisfaction in the repeated circuit of *jouissance*' (*Ticklish Subject* 295) is highly suggestive. It recalls not only Conrad's crepuscular figuration of Patusan, with its 'spectral herd of shapeless creatures' and 'spectral and lifeless stream' with 'red gleam[s]' that 'twinkle' (*Lord Jim* 154-55) amid the twilight, but also in the 'repeated circuit' that comes to define Jim's relationship to the region. Marlow's comments upon the natural phenomena he witnesses during his visit supports this idea. He observes that Jim appears to 'have a hand in regulating that unique spectacle'—that '[h]e [regulates] so many things in Patusan' (138)—and later designates the region a 'world' that is 'the work of [Jim's] own hands' (256). The realm of drive echoes this coextensive existence as Žižek refers to 'an Otherness which directly "'is"' ourselves, staging the phantasmatic core of our being' (*Ticklish Subject* 302), and that this structure 'generates spectral phenomena that obey our innermost idiosyncratic whims' (303). Perceived through this framework, it is as if the realm of Patusan functions in some way as a psychic expression of Jim's drive.

Furthermore, Žižek notes that 'drive is something in which the subject is caught' and that the 'problem with drive is [...] how to break its loop, the hold of its inert power over us' (*Ticklish Subject* 297). This problematic, inescapable satisfaction that drive entails can be located when Marlow seems to articulate a very similar notion in his observations of Jim's life, where it is 'they [the community of Patusan] that possess [...] him' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 155). Conrad suggests that Jim, their 'leader', is 'captive in every sense [.] Every day add[s] a link to the fetters of that strange freedom' (164). From the Lacanian standpoint, this is more

than simple integration on Jim's part in a new community. It is the irreducible "stain" of *jouissance* that insists within Jim as a subject of drive, inextricably embedding him within the symbolic order of Patusan. These structural modalities of drive further reveal themselves in Jim's day-to-day actions. Žižek suggests that the 'drive involves a kind of self-reflexive turn, not a simple reversal of the active into the passive mode [...] but into the more ambiguous middle way of *se faire voir*, of making-oneself-seen [italics in original]' (*Ticklish Subject* 298). Jim's monthly coffee drinking ritual with the Rajah—where Jim exposes himself to the risk of poison—appears to enact this linguistic construction. As he states, 'I must stand the risk[.] Many people trust me to do that' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 157). He publicly makes himself seen in a ritual that guarantees his symbolic position both with the Rajah and the general community, in an act that is neither distinctly active nor passive. This repeated cycle with its ever-present possibility of poisoning—one that never actually occurs—mirrors the way the 'drive [unendingly] moves around the object' (Lacan, *Four Concepts* 168), as the 'real source of enjoyment is the repetitive movement of this closed circuit' (Evans 46).

Indeed, Jim's defeat of the assassins perfectly exemplifies this grammatical shift that drive dictates in its 'self-reflexive' function. Marlow relates that Jim 'h[olds] his shot, he says, deliberately[.] He h[olds] it for the pleasure of saying to himself: That's a dead man!' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 188). Here, again, is the structure of 'making-oneself-seen', of being able to perceptually distance one's action from oneself—to be able to see oneself seeing it—in order to 'enjoy' its occurrence, articulating the movement of drive within Jim.

### **Lacan's and Conrad's female subject**

Beyond consideration of the modalities of drive in the latter half of *Lord Jim*, Conrad's construction of the female subject can also be discussed. An aspect of *jouissance* that must be acknowledged is the resonance of the maternal. *Jouissance*, in its strict oceanic, pre-



symbolic phase is classified as the 'mother-child dyad' (Fink, *Subject* 185) – the moment before the subject is instituted in the symbolic through the act of separation. In this sense, the real *qua das Ding* has distinctly incestuous connotations. What makes this pertinent for examining Jim's position in Patusan is that Jim's acceptance into Doramin's family marks the first appearance of any visibly maternal reference in *Lord Jim* in regards to Jim himself whilst also indicating a substitution of the paternal function. Having escaped the imprisonment, Jim then enjoys a period of respite in Doramin's home, where his wife takes 'a motherly fancy' to Jim and 'made a to-do over me as if I had been her own son' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 160). The fact that Jim is also placed in their marital bed, 'an immense bed – her state bed' (160), can be perceived as shaded with undertones of incest, which seemingly further echoes the presence of *Das Ding* with its inherent incestuous impulse.

Conrad's figuration of the female subject, evoked through Jim's relationship with Jewel, continues a representation of the female that is, for the most part, consistent with its depiction in *Almayer's Folly*. Intriguingly, Jewel in *Lord Jim* mirrors in many ways Nina, and both characters are striking in their structural affinity with the Lacanian model of the female subject. As examined in my previous chapter, the representation of the male subject is fully available to the symbolic order, being wholly determined by the phallic function, whereas the determination of the female subject is only partially subjected to the symbolic order through the position of the phallus. Accordingly, the female form of symbolic representation appears incomplete and unbounded — that almost 'ethereal vision' (Luepnitz 230) of femininity which escapes the symbolic order. Like Nina, Jewel is unsurprisingly introduced as 'the flitting of a white form' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 174) and as a 'ghostly figure' whose features are 'impossible to distinguish' (193). The distancing of the female from the male within the community, earlier evidenced in the 'witch-like' appearance of Nina's mother, is continued with Conrad's reference to Jewel as 'more inscrutable [...] than the Sphinx' (192) in her appearance to Marlow. Indeed, the representation of Jewel's subjectivity is, rather than figured as

independent to Jim's, demarcated as utterly dependent — as little more than a narcissistic extension of Jim's own subjective being in a similar mode to Nina's narcissistic function for Almayer and Dain. Marlow remarks how Jewel speaks in tones the same as Jim's 'own clipping, boyish intonation' (177) and that she 'live[s] so completely in his contemplation that she has acquired something of his outward aspect' (177). Most pertinently however, when retiring at night, Jewel's partially demarcated female subject is reduced even further, as the couple's conversation appears instead 'like a self-communion of one being carried on in two tones' (178) indicating the narcissistic limitation inherent in her textual representation.

Jewel is articulated primarily through language hewn from the male subject's fantasy space, in terms redolent of Nina, constituted through imagery suggestive of great material wealth. The agent's references to Jim as 'a mysterious white man in Patusan who had got hold of an extraordinary gem — namely, an emerald of enormous size, and altogether priceless' (175) and how his female 'w[ears] the white man's jewel' (176) entails a conflation of the precious gem, the 'enormous', 'priceless' emerald and Jewel herself, owned by the 'white man'. This conflation results in the representation of her subjectivity as articulated through the fantasy space of the male, in this case the commercial agent, for which she functions as an *objet petit a*. Further, the conflation of her subjective being with the physical gem, when considered in the context of the agent imploring Marlow to help with acquiring the precious item as a commercial transaction, situates the female as an object of exchange, very much as Nina is positioned in *Almayer's Folly*.

It is striking, given Jewel's figuration by Conrad, how she can be identified as 'being' the phallus in the text—the object of desire—in much the same way as Nina is, in light of their respective linguistic constitution. However, this would then necessitate identifying the 'holder' of the phallus. Conrad's figuration of Dain is replete with an intensification of phallic symbolism encoded into his subjective representation; so too Jim's subjectivity is uncannily drawn with a nexus of phallic elements. He is clearly the 'holder' of the object of desire, Jewel

herself, but it is his bodyguard and devoted man-servant, Tamb 'Itam, one who is 'ready to lay down his life' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 177) for Jim, who carries these phallic allusions which are then subordinated to Jim. Itam is seen 'standing rigidly erect' (177)—the same word recurs in Conrad's description of Dain—when guarding his 'white lord' (177), and carries those items encoding phallic power; his 'kris, chopper, and lance (besides carrying Jim's gun)' (177). While the highly problematic concentration of power into male hands through the structure of the phallus remains unsettlingly consistent across both subject structures of desire and drive, it is possible to identify in *Lord Jim* a subtle, yet discernible, development in the sophistication of Conrad's depiction of the female subject. Whereas Nina is subsumed by the patriarchal structures of Dain's homeland in *Almayer's Folly* after she leaves with the Balinese prince—she is not heard of again—, Jewel remains present in the narrative after the death of Jim. Her anger at Jim that he is 'false' (259), as well as her continuing presence in Stein's house, perhaps offers, however briefly, a glimpse of a female subject that is independent of the male, and the emergence of a nascent female autonomy that finds a much fuller realisation later in the figure of Natalia Haldin in *Under Western Eyes*.

### **The Lacanian drive as death drive: the paradox of Jim's subjective structure**

I have established Jim's status as subject of drive—accessing a mode of *jouissance* that entails satisfaction—by examining his consolidation of the ethical possibilities opened by the Lacanian act and of the inter-dependency between his subjectivity and the symbolic space of Patusan. Clearly, his subjective constitution within Patusan's space markedly contrasts to the space of the imperial symbolic which constitutes Marlow. Finally, Conrad's use of grammatical constructions to delineate Jim's actions—articulating as they do the movement of drive by 'making oneself seen'—have also been illustrated.

It is necessary, however, to acknowledge and engage with the full ramifications of

drive within the Lacanian model; a model entailing, as it does, inherent dangers for the capacity of the subject to sustain itself within this structure. For Lacan, the accession to drive from desire is not without complication and is recurrently problematic in regards to his theorisation of the subject. In his view, the death drive is potentially immanent within all manifestations of drive for the subject, as he asserts that ‘every drive is virtually a death drive’ (*Écrits* 719). As such, the drive has the capacity to necessitate a movement back to non-existence. Due to this potential dynamic of the drive, it can conceivably ‘pursue’ its ‘own extinction’ (Evans 34), or, as Tony Jackson puts it in his reading of the *denouement* of Lord Jim, the death drive’s ‘absolute return to the originally pure state can only be achieved in death’ (94). Thus the appearance of Gentleman Brown might be interpreted as an inevitable symptom inherent in the functioning of drive. Given that, in Lacanian thought, the drive pushes forwards to ‘the realm of excess *jouissance* where enjoyment is experienced as suffering’ (Evans 33), the shift from enjoyment as pleasure, in Jim’s rise, to enjoyment as pain, in the appearance of Brown, is an unsurprising possibility that echoes the “destructive” possibilities of *jouissance*.

The figure of Gentleman Brown is frequently categorised as Jim’s *doppelgänger*. John Batchelor suggests that Brown is Jim’s ‘double’ (151) and Collits sees Jim ‘shadowed by a sinister twin’ so that Brown ‘represents the disabling return of Jim’s repressed guilt’ (134). Alenka Zupančič argues that the notion of the double represents a schism in the subject of drive. Firstly, therefore, the conception of the double in a Lacanian context must be explained. Zupančič identifies, in the model of *jouissance*, a situation in which Lacan places ‘the source of hostility’ in the ‘field of enjoyment’ so that the ‘heart of the problem is that I experience my own enjoyment [...] as strange and hostile’ (*Ethics Real* 225). The Poe story of ‘William Wilson’ is posited by Zupančič as an ‘exemplary’ (225) instance where enjoyment is exteriorised into the figure of the double. Given then that the subject cannot integrate this enjoyment into its own subjectivity, what is ‘excluded reappears in the image of that from

which it had been excluded. Here, of course, we find the phenomenon of the double' (226).

The appearance of Brown, then, from the Lacanian perspective, is a consequence of this structurally intrinsic dynamic. The double is 'situated somewhere beyond the logic of recognition' (*Ethics Real* 226) by Župančič which would explain Conrad's differing visual figuration of Brown, and Jim's and Brown's relationship as functioning through allusions of cultural and ethnic similarity, rather than precise sameness. This similarity is evident through the invocation of their 'common blood, an assumption of common experience; a sickening suggestion of common guilt [and] of secret knowledge that was like a bond of their minds and of their hearts' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 242-43). Brown almost seems to embody that manifestation of the double that Župančič refers to as one of 'the monstrous creatures who incarnate *jouissance* as such [and] which threatens to swallow us' (*Ethics Real* 226). His reputation 'as the terror of this or that group of islands in Polynesia' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 220) and his desire to 'play havoc with that jungle town which had defied him, to see it strewn over with corpses and enveloped in flames' (232) is certainly suggestive of Župančič's 'monstrous creatures'.

In Žižek's own conception of drive, similar to Župančič's, there is also an acknowledgement of the role of the double. However, Žižek qualifies the function of the double with a proviso pertinent to Jim's handling of Brown's departure. In this instance the subject needs to follow a process 'according to which I have to recognize my own substance in the very force which seems to resist and thwart my endeavor' (*Ticklish Subject* 303) and thus 'in the shift towards drive, I (the subject) "'make-myself-seen"' as the Thing – in a reflexive turn, I see myself as It, the traumatic object-Thing I didn't want to see' (301). When translated onto Jim's and Brown's confrontation, this notion might suggest that Jim recognises an aspect of himself in Brown. It would therefore explain Jim's decision to allow Brown safe passage through the jungle rather than killing him when the opportunity is available. Of course, this decision results in Brown's murder of Dain Waris, Doramin's son and

Jim's adopted brother, and Jim's consequent acceptance of responsibility for his murder. The return of Jim's ring to Doramin as Dain Waris' body is brought back appears to seal Jim's fate, suggesting that the murderous intent of Brown is actually aimed at Jim but articulated through the circulation of the symbolic token of the ring – the ring that belongs to Jim. Just prior to Doramin shooting him dead, the ring f[alls] and roll[s] against the foot' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 260) of Jim. The fact that the ring finally returns to Jim again, after passing through the hands of Dain and Doramin, suggests Brown's bullet that kills Dain Waris is destined for Jim, but must be symbolically mediated through the figure of Doramin. Brown, as Jim's double and manifestation of drive *qua* death drive, instigates the final sequence of events ensuring Jim's 'extinction'.

This interpretation enables a refutation of the critical consensus surrounding Jim's choice to confront Doramin – a consensus that often centres upon Jim's alleged adherence to a code of duty. Jacques Berthoud perceives it as reflecting the novel's ongoing concern, where 'taken to its logical conclusion, honour becomes absolutely incompatible with life' (92). Ian Watt, in a similar vein, argues it 'constitutes the most dramatic refutation of the charge that on the *Patna* he had put his life above his honour' (352). Whilst these are certainly plausible claims, Jim's decision is perhaps rather the culmination of the drive's possible movement towards the 'extinction' of its subject – a potential imperative contained in its very structure. His decision is instead a disturbing presentiment which points to the inescapable conclusion that the subjective possibility of drive is a highly precarious and fragile form of subjectivity, founded as it is upon the elusive, destructive potential of *jouissance*. Therefore, it is possible to conceive of Jim's fate as, rather, a failure to consolidate the particular liberating potential opened up by acceding to the position of drive. This perspective becomes more viable once we compare it to the other character displaying the hallmarks of drive—and subjective autonomy—but meets a different end to Jim – that of Stein.

Indeed, this differing figuration of the subject of drive is evidence of Conrad enriching what appears to be a psychoanalytic concept beyond the theoretical confines of Lacan. Stein is presented as having moved beyond being the subject of desire yet, in marked contrast to Jim, sustains his subjective location in the field of drive. The key point is to identify by what means Stein is able to maintain his subjectivity, and it would appear that this process is achieved through Stein having adopted a position similar to that of the Analyst. This designation of the character is highly feasible, given the extent to which his earlier meeting with Marlow echoes that of a psychoanalytic consultation with his subsequent advice for Jim of '[h]ow to be' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 133) as discussed earlier in this chapter. By virtue of this implied comparison within the text, Conrad appears to suggest that once a subject has acceded to drive, the means of maintaining his or her liberation is to become the Analyst themselves – a course of action which Jim clearly does not follow. This structure of the Analyst is one that recurs in Conrad's later novel, *Under Western Eyes*, and will be further explored in my corresponding chapter on that text.

A suggestive, further implication of Conrad's figuration of Jim in Patusan is how the subject of drive appears to exist outside of the highly rationalised, Cartesian symbolic reality subordinated to capitalism – the space of Jim's voyage in the *Patna*. Indeed, the *Patna* sequence earlier in the novel seems to suggest that the ego, or consciousness, of the subject is wholly constituted within a rational, precisely calibrated socio-symbolic order. After the failure of the subject of drive, Conrad's interest appears to shift back upon the rationalised and ostensibly transparent model of social reality constituting the *Patna* sequence of the narrative. It is the fabric of—and relationship between—the ego and this form of symbolic reality that Conrad magnifies, and then fundamentally dissects, in *The Secret Agent*.

## Chapter Three: *The Secret Agent*, Rationalism and Lacan's Subject of Science

### Critical terrain of *The Secret Agent*

The fictional world that Conrad creates in *The Secret Agent* is a construct heavily indebted to a specific, highly rationalised figuration of reality. It is through a Lacanian analysis that this figuration, with its limits and consequences, will become visible. As such, this section of my interpretation will have a particular focus on Conrad's representation of rationalism, abstraction and mathematics at work in the novel. As will become clear, a specific form of subjectivity commensurate with this rational model of symbolic reality emerges. It is a structure that can be aligned with a certain mode of the Lacanian subject related to the *cogito*: the subject of science.

It is worth briefly considering where this Lacanian interpretation can be situated in the debate surrounding what is surely one of Conrad's indisputable masterpieces. Appropriately, critical perspective of the work has been remarkably consistent. At the incunabula of this viewpoint is F.R. Leavis, who, in *The Great Tradition*, first asserts *The Secret Agent's* status as worthy of establishing Conrad's literary preeminence. Dusting it off from critical neglect, Leavis declares that it is 'much more indubitably a classic and a masterpiece [and] it appears to have had nothing like due recognition' (209), while lauding how skillfully Conrad's 'irony bears on the egocentric naiveties of moral conviction, the conventionality of conventional moral attitudes' (210). Albert Guerard, writing in 1958, is more cautious in his praise, yet recognises within the novel 'a conscious effort to chasten and simplify style, to subdue temperamental evasiveness and control digressive fantasy' (218). For Guerard, *The Secret Agent* represents primarily a stylistic achievement of artistic precision and linguistic control,



where out of all of Conrad's works it is 'perhaps the only one to know fairly well what it is doing from the first sentence to the last' (219).

A year later, R.W. Stallman, in a 1959 essay, focuses upon what is now perhaps one of the most scrutinised aspects of the novel, the presence of the Meridian project—the mapping of the earth's surface through longitude and latitude—in Conrad's exploration of temporal and spatial structures in the text. While Stallman briefly alludes to 'Vladimir's theory that aims at the destruction of science' (120), the importance of science is generally elided. Even twenty years later, Jacques Berthoud only offers a nascent acknowledgement of the influence of science upon Conrad, stating that 'Conrad makes it quite clear that he has no quarrel with the true scientific spirit' but notices that the author 'makes it equally clear that it is open to the most cynical abuse' (157). Clearly, science is one key aspect of debate surrounding the text<sup>9</sup>, and, in recent years, criticism has frequently emphasised the importance of the Meridian and its relationship to certain forms of space and time in the novel – elements which will be discussed in due course. However, perhaps the most consistent strand of critical discourse focuses upon Conrad's choice of irony in his construction of the narrative.

### **A new target of Conradian irony in *The Secret Agent***

Of course, Conrad's use of irony in *The Secret Agent* is one of the most distinctive features of the novel and its narrative voice. Its pervasiveness is perhaps best acknowledged by Irving Howe, who observes that 'Conrad's ironic tone suffuses every sentence [...] to the point where one yearns for the relief of a direct statement almost as if it were an ethical good' (qtd. in Erdinast-Vulcan, "Sudden Holes" 207). One such potential effect of this 'universal' and 'relentless' use of irony is that it may, ultimately, 'negate the possibility of objective truth' (Prickett 55) in the text. Howe sees the effect of this irony in more invasive terms, suggesting the novel is 'surrounded by a thick fog of irony which steadily eats away at

the features, the energies, the very vitals of its major characters' (qtd. in Erdinast-Vulcan, "Sudden Holes" 207) for a much more definitive and pessimistic result. This irony renders every belief, action and emotion of the characters problematic for the reader.

While Aaron Matz may question the use of the term irony, so that for him it 'becomes a problem of distinguishing what we mean by that endlessly thorny term' (166), both he and Dapha Erdinast-Vulcan ultimately defer to Wayne C. Booth's concept of irony as being dominant in the novel. Booth discusses the concept of a 'stable' irony—one with an 'intended[,] and localized' (7) meaning—in contrast to 'unstable' irony (240). Unstable irony has a structural dynamic of an 'infinite negativity' (245) – a shifting form of irony that 'involves a constant undercutting of meaning followed in turn by an undercutting of the reconstructed meaning' (Erdinast-Vulcan, "Sudden Holes" 208). The cumulative effect of this form is that the reader is 'denied the relative comfort of simply electing the contrary meaning of what is being offered' (Matz 167) which, in turn, prevents the reader from 'arriv[ing] at a final affirmation of an authorial stance' (Erdinast-Vulcan, "Sudden Holes" 208). It is important to note that these comments, while convincing, are primarily focused upon Conrad's treatment of character and action. This narrative treatment is regarded as a fundamental aspect of the novel. As Matz clearly remarks, *The Secret Agent* is 'unquestionably a book that relies on its steadfast, arch detachment from its characters' (166) first and foremost in regards to its use of irony.

However, a deeper, more tectonic level of irony may be present in the text. This level is a hitherto undetected, acidic irony that insidiously disrupts the elementary fabric of social reality and the concreteness of epistemological certainty upon which the characters stand. Martha A. Turner suggests that the Newtonian world-view, where '[m]echanistic science admits the possibility of an accurate, objective overview of objects and events located in homogenous time and space' (128), is one that influences the main characters' perspectives in the text and which, in turn, Conrad disrupts. While this comment is resonant, I believe

Conrad's ironic critique of rationalism goes much deeper. A Lacanian reading of the work will, I hope, reveal that Conrad engages with, critiques and finally undermines the model of Cartesian-Newtonian rationalism. This is the model that constitutes not just the dominant form of social reality but also subjectivity that Conrad depicts in the text. Accordingly, it is not just character that is ruthlessly subject to an ironical dissection and reconstruction. It is also the far more fundamental construct of an abstract, rationalised reality predicated upon mathematics that comprises both social reality and the subject. This form of reality that Conrad critiques is briefly glimpsed in *Almayer's Folly*, explored further in the *Patna* sequence of *Lord Jim*, and is the one in which Jim is constituted as a subject of desire. It is in *The Secret Agent*, however, that Conrad chooses to magnify and examine the ideological fabric of this system to its greatest extent and with the harshest irony.

Conrad's ironising of the scientific voice take multiple forms. One such example of ironic incision into this rational model is through the subject of science's misplaced certitudes – the consummately eloquent Vladimir's deference to the immutable ideality of 'pure mathematics' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 34). This reliance on an ostensibly inviolable intellectual system to guarantee a rational model of reality is ironically exposed as inherently deficient. It is structurally ridden with aporias and gaps, most notable in the central absence of the explosion. Further, the conceptual possibility of a rational, abstract symbolic space established in the novel's opening pages is contemptuously undermined by Conrad through the ruptures that occur to this model of apprehension. There is also the uniformity of matter and pockets of seemingly infinite Cartesian space that orbit around the person of Verloc. That Conrad treats this space ironically is difficult to doubt – these pockets of space more often than not appear to lead nowhere, only into an unlighted, eternal abyss. The hopelessness of this theoretical infinitude of space only appears to heighten the intense claustrophobia of London that Conrad offers in his depiction of a 'densely-populated', 'murky and oppressive' city (Watts, "Myth" 29). The ironic undercutting further seeps into the consciousness of the

characters' themselves – their topologically inflected means of conceptualisation appears as limiting as they do prescriptive. However, the elucidation of this level of irony in *The Secret Agent* does not offer relief or a secure authorial perspective for the reader. In fact, it simply serves as an intensification of Howe's 'thick fog of irony which steadily eats away' at not only the interiors of the characters, but also the internal structure of social reality itself.

From a Lacanian perspective, the suturing over the explosion of the real in the symbolic order by the subject of science *qua cogito* serves one purpose. That purpose is to maintain the ideological *status-quo* of the ossified, static subjective and symbolic structures governing social reality. For Lacan, it is not by suturing over the real, but rather by encountering and coming to terms with the "truth" it offers that the subject can perhaps gain a modicum of satisfaction in its existence.

### ***The Secret Agent* and Lacan: rational, abstract space and subjectivity**

The plot of the novel sees the ostensible anarchist, Verloc, in fact an agent for a foreign power and occasionally the English police, desperately attempt a bombing of the Royal Observatory, the location of the Prime Meridian—a product of mathematical physics and testament to Britain's global dominance—to appease his Russian paymaster, Vladimir. Vladimir's aim is to ensure a restriction of liberty for anarchists residing in Great Britain. Such is the indolent Verloc's anxiety that he foolishly enlists the help of his mentally disabled brother-in-law, Stevie, who perishes in the bungled explosion, much to the horror and anguish of Stevie's sister and Verloc's wife, Winnie, who then murders Verloc in turn. Yet underlying what the Assistant Commissioner finally designates a 'domestic drama' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 160) is the recurrent structure of a highly abstract rationalism of which mathematics occupies a privileged position. This rationalism is the founding paradigm that enables the meridian project to develop and function in the first place, and it is this

relationship—between the locus of the prime meridian, rationality and the subject—that remains fundamentally uncharted.

The role of rationalism *qua* geometry in the functioning of the Meridian project is foundational. The Meridian system's science of spatial measurement has a fundamental 'connection' to the 'Cartesian Coordinate system' (Alinghaus and Kerski 9). This connection is evidence of, in one sense, its profound indebtedness to and lineage from Cartesian rationalism and, by implication, Descartes' *cogito* – the 'truth' of '*I am thinking, therefore I exist*' that, for the philosopher, is 'so firm and sure that all the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics [are] incapable of shaking it' (Descartes 36, italics in original). Indeed, Descartes himself 'propose[s] mathematics as an ideal for physical science' and attempts to 'base all knowledge ultimately on the intuitive certainty of the *Cogito*' (Clarke 11), implying an inextricable link between a certain structure of subjectivity—the Cartesian subject—and a specific model of science. It is this connection, between a conscious, self-present subject—what will become evident in my interpretation as the subject of science—and an abstract, rationally determined structure of social reality that a Lacanian interpretation will unlock in the deeper fabric of Conrad's novel.

Significantly then, the site of Greenwich in *The Secret Agent* is the zero point of an intrinsically spatialised symbolic system constructed primarily through rationalism. As a consequence, this operation situates Greenwich at 'the centre of an earth space so abstract that it is not only mapped and gridded but also timed' (Coroneos 56). This high level of abstraction, with its pervasive mapping and gridding, helps establish what David Leon Higdon designates as 'a mechanical objectifying and totalizing system measuring out existence' (3). Accordingly, Conrad's engagement with the meridian project allows him to critique a theoretically fully mapped and encompassed global space – one which enables a system of measurement that can determine and quantify the precise location of any object at any point within the matrices of its structure. Further, 'the simple fact that all time – legal time, civil

time, astronomical time, and Universal Time – emanates from Greenwich Observatory’ (Stallman 102) equips this system with an equally measurable temporal dimension.

As the system underpinning the Meridian project is derived from Cartesian rationalism, it is necessary at this juncture to outline the Lacanian model of reality and its relationship to the conscious subject of the *cogito*. This is due to their fundamental importance in this section of my interpretation, as they will help elucidate the abstract rationalism at work within *The Secret Agent* and the structure of subjectivity co-terminous to it. Lacan’s conception of reality and its relationship to the subject must be, from the outset, acknowledged as problematic. In its broadest sense, his order of the symbolic can encompass not only the complexities of space and social reality but also aspects of the subject itself. Immediately, this might imply a conflation between these components – between objective or ‘real’ space on the one hand, and psychic or subjective space on the other if they are both constituted through the symbolic. Although Lacan’s ideas of the subject and symbolic space are not actually a conflation *per se*, they still present difficulties in that an unequivocal distinction cannot be drawn between the two. Indeed, as Tom Evers states, Lacan posits a ‘fundamental questioning of the notion that subjective interiority is ever fully or unproblematically *opposed* to the world of objects [italics in original]’ (23). For Lacan, space might be characterised as an ‘indeterminate dialectic of subject and object’ (Noyes 69) which renders a precise identification of the exact point where the two intersect, or, indeed, diverge, as highly challenging. Whilst this disruption of a clear demarcation between interiority and exteriority is an integral aspect of Lacan’s model of subjectivity, Lacan’s lack of clear explication on this matter also renders a discussion of space both complex and, perhaps, at times, inconclusive.

Whilst problematic, these challenges are not insurmountable for a Lacanian interpretation of Conrad. There is, rather than conflation, coextensiveness between what can be termed conscious, subjective space and then external, physical or objective space. This becomes

understandable given what Lacan identifies as their mutual lineage from a mathematically inflected, abstract rationalism. By approaching each separately we might be able to then employ them in a Lacanian interpretation.

Firstly, Lacan's conception of symbolic reality, or, what could be termed objective, physical space, can be historically situated. According to Lacan, this form of space originated in the seventeenth century at the 'historically defined moment' (*Écrits* 727) of the birth of modern science. It is at this moment that 'the idea gain[s] ground that reality is to be approached as an autonomously operating "'logical'" —in this case, mathematical—system. This idea f[inds] a first great proponent in Galileo and it decisively penetrates our physics with Isaac Newton' (de Kesel 59). Reality then, which includes empirical space, is constituted as a highly rational, abstract construct historically originating from the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment. Lacan contends that this process has 'led to the structuralization of reality by physics' (*Ethics* 92) which is still dominant today. Space, within which the subject moves, is Newtonian and Cartesian in nature. It is utterly rational. It obeys specific laws and behaves according to exact, predetermined and observable criteria. This is not to say that a mathematical schema is imposed on reality from without. Instead, as Ann Banfield suggests, Lacan's theory of space 'involves the assumption of a prior condition permitting this mathematicization[;] "'mathematicizable"' designates a quality *inherent in the empirical* [italics in original]' (qtd. in Eyers 69). Related to these considerations, it is worth noting that empiricism's, and, by extension, the system of behavioral psychology's, mode of conceptualising the subject is regarded as fundamentally flawed by Lacan. He argues that in this system, 'psychical phenomena' (Lacan, *Écrits* 63) must either be diminished to fit into 'the operations of rational knowledge', or, alternatively, explained via a 'determinism' that reduces them to being the 'prop of a physical object or related to a biological end' (63) and fully available to empirical cataloguing. By virtue of this process, psychical reality is invariably vitiated and only understood via a 'system of references that are valid in already established

[...] physical sciences' (63).

Yet this aforementioned rationalism is not exclusive to social reality, however. It is also at the heart of the subject itself. This conception of an abstract, rational reality is wholly commensurate with a specific model of the subject – the Cartesian *cogito*. The two forms are fundamentally inter-related. It is 'not *just* the constitution of a new object in the form of mathematized nature but *also* the emergence of the Cartesian *cogito* as the subject of science [italics in original]' (Grigg 137) that enables this paradigm to establish itself. As Lacan states, this 'historically defined moment' is the one 'Descartes inaugurates that goes by the name of *cogito*' (*Écrits* 727). Lacan's designation of the *cogito* as the subject of science reflects its intimate connection to the birth of modern science and rationalism. So there are mutual structural elements present between both the subject and space. What can be designated 'objective space' is a reality dependent upon a mathematically inflected rationality. Concomitantly, the subject structure that apprehends this reality—the *cogito*—is similarly predicated on this logic. So, already, one can see how they share a similar constitutive fabric.

This rationalised form of reality is the only reality the conscious subject can know according to Lacan. Quite simply, it *is* reality for the subject. While there is common ground between the subject and social reality or empirical space, this is not the only co-extensiveness between them. In fact, there is something that underpins both. Lacanian thought identifies in this 'mathematical approach to reality an initial affirmation of the primacy of the signifier. It is not our insight into their *real* kernel that explains the state of things; this is done by a self-functioning symbolic system that in itself has nothing to do with reality as such [italics in original]' (de Kesel 59-60). What this means is that what is experienced and known as reality for the subject—physical space for one—is mediated solely through the symbolic order of language and the signifier. What lies beyond this is the real which, by definition, cannot be assimilated into the symbolic order. This is not to say that the



Lacanian conception of space denies a reality outside of its representation through the signifier in a social constructivist sense. Lacan certainly allows for the existence of a reality and objecthood outside of the symbolic structures which constitute our perception of and relationship to this reality. What Lacan asserts is that the subject cannot conceive of this reality outside of its means of representation through the signifier.

Consequently, in the Lacanian model, reality is constituted through the symbolic that allows the subject to experience it. It is worth briefly focusing on the mechanics of this process. Initially, the 'psychic apparatus' of the subject enables it to experience the 'outside world' (de Kesel 76) – of which physical space is obviously one aspect. Crucially, this process 'however, changes the status of the outside world from being merely a real entity to a "logical" discourse, a linguistically organized field of representations' (76). What the subject then 'obtains from this reality will also be something "discursive" [...] something linguistic or symbolic' (76). For Lacan, what is experienced as the outside world is thus perceived as a 'discourse' (*Ethics* 75) and the subject 'know[s] nothing else except this discourse. That which emerges [is] the perception of this discourse' (75) and understood within the structure of language by the subject.

As a result, something perceived by the subject that is external to them—a physical sensation, an object or a voice—'in its turn, only has meaning (reality value) because it is taken up in a network of signifiers. It is solely in expressions and sounds—and thus in fact in words and language—that reality presents itself *consciously* to the psyche [italics in original]' (de Kesel 78). While this might well be a limitation of Lacan's system, in that it contains any experience of external reality within language and possibly precludes anything outside of it, it equally suggests that there is a co-terminous quality between the subject and external reality as both are constituted through a linguistic and rational system. And it is through these parameters that 'Lacan repeats yet again the metapsychological reason why we cannot but relate to reality as a field of signifiers' (de Kesel 79). The subject can only know reality

through a linguistic, rational medium – never beyond this medium.

Ultimately what this demonstrates is that there is a fundamental co-extensiveness between social space and the subject as both are constituted by the symbolic. Therefore similar operations, figures and components may be discernible across both the subject and external spatial reality. Given that Lacan's subject of science—the *cogito*—is an epitome of abstract, rational process, and, that social space is itself a highly rationalised, mathematically inflected construct, there may be geometrical and rational operations that are enacted in both but also across both simultaneously. Tom Evers argues that elements of symbolic reality are both internal and exterior to the subject's very structure. He states that 'the image of the Other remains at least partially foreign, exterior to the [...] subject, even as it remains crucial in defining the contours of subjectivity as such' (Evers 23). The capitalisation of 'Other' in Evers' comment clearly identifies it as the big Other or symbolic order, as distinguished from the 'other' of a different subject.

So any clean division between the conscious subject and external reality is rejected as both are inter-related. This rejection of a neat dichotomy is also present on the inter-subjective level. What enables the conscious subject to retain its belief in its self-knowledge and supposed autonomy is Lacan's notion of *méconnaissance* or misunderstanding. This is a vital trait of the conscious subject of the ego in the imaginary order. While the ego or the subject believes in its secure self-conception, this belief is fundamentally misplaced. The ego gains its self-conception through a process that is, in the most fundamental sense, exterior to itself. Lacan identifies how the image of external reality is in fact intrinsic to the establishment and maintenance of conscious subjectivity. He asserts that the 'total form of [the subject's] body' is given to them only through a 'mirage [and an] exteriority' (Lacan, *Écrits* 76) which is obviously outside of the subject themselves.

Evers observes how the 'mirror image, then, provides the first explication of unity for the [subject]' (20) but that 'any illusory self-grounding provided by the formation of the ego is

undercut by the very sources of that self-grounding, predicated as they are on alienation in the chimeric image of the other' (20-21). The 'other' in this case can take the form of another subject or any surface that reinforces the self-conception of the subject as a unified being. However, Evers argues correctly that this 'gap [in the subject] remains open by virtue of the exteriority of the source of unity' (20) so that the conscious subject, while believing itself to be autonomous and unitary, is, in fact, inherently dependent upon external reality in order to maintain itself. It is not static or concrete. As Lacan states, the subject's unity 'will forever remain irreducible for any single individual' (*Écrits* 76) as it maintains its structure through a position that Evers likens to a 'perpetual exteriority' (20). So the subject is unknowingly decentred, or externally constituted, and unceasingly fixed outside of itself. This highly complex structure is part of 'Lacan's ventures into expanding the dimensionality of how we conceive of the relationship between psyche, body, and the world' so that what seems 'innermost' to the subject in their psychic, conscious space, is 'constituted in a space radically distinct from any simple inside/outside opposition' (Evers 20). It is certainly possible to locate Lacan's model of space more broadly within the "spatial turn" in criticism. This turn is one that focuses on the 'power inherent in configurations of space' (Jaffe and de Koning, "Introduction" 11), and draws 'strong inspiration from [other] French thinkers' such as Michel Foucault, who focuses on 'the productive nature of power' (11) in the control of space, and, Henri Lefebvre, who views space as a 'social product' that works to 'reproduce the interests of the powerful' (11). However, Lacan offers a considerably lesser known and hitherto under-examined conception of space that both retains the notion of the subject—unlike, for example, Foucault—and which focuses on the importance of language in conceptualising and experiencing space.

For the purposes of this chapter of my interpretation, what I will designate as symbolic space or reality, or socio-symbolic space, is a physical, spatial reality ostensibly external to the conscious subject or cogito and composed from a mathematically inflected

rationalism. It is a 'symbolisation' that 'hollows out the real and opens what we usually call "real space"' [.]. It comprises the space of pages and paragraphs [,] but also corridors and rooms of a building, streets and neighborhoods in a city', and, 'even open spaces and geographical environments' (Cuéllar 7). Ultimately, it is what Žižek terms our 'common everyday reality[.] This social reality is then nothing but a fragile, symbolic cobweb that can at any moment be torn aside by an intrusion of the real' (Awry 18).

### **The rationalised space of Verloc's shop**

From a Lacanian perspective, then, a mathematically inflected, highly rationalised reality is discernible at the very start of the text. As Verloc prepares to walk to the embassy, there is a subtle emphasis on numerical and topological measurement in Conrad's depiction of the anarchist's household. Conrad sketches out the domestic abode of Verloc through precise reference to the spatial qualities and materials that constitute it. The 'shop [is] small, and so [is] the house [...] one of those grimy brick houses which exist [...] in large quantities' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 13), which suggests its numerical ubiquity within London. The author then foregrounds the specific structure of its physical form nuanced with topological details, indicative of the Lacanian conception of a symbolic reality with a pronounced 'geometrization of space' (Koyré, *Galileo* 3). The shop is delineated as 'a square box of a place, with the front glazed in small panes' (*Secret Agent* 13) which Conrad develops into an intensively mapped presentation of its interior, detailing the minutiae of the objects located inside. As Christine W. Sizemore insightfully observes, there is an 'image pattern of boxes and containers' (23) in the opening of the novel with a marked emphasis on the 'basic shape of the container' (26). This perspective of the 'square box' of the shop is then magnified into the precise shapes and properties of the wares within it. The 'window contain[s] photographs[,.] nondescript packages in wrappers like patent medicines; closed yellow paper envelopes[,.] a dingy blue

china bowl, a casket of black wood, bottles of marking ink, and rubber stamps' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 13). Conrad enacts the intensification of a topological, spatial perspective in a limited domain—that of one house—that reflects Lacan's imperative of a rationally determined, abstract reality.

This reality incorporates the spatialised apprehension and analysis of every object within its scope, which clearly reflects the meridian project's comprehensive mapping of space. In a Lacanian sense, the rationalism constituting this socio-symbolic order 'holds that there is no boundary limiting its material domain [and] there exists nothing material that modern science cannot treat as one of its objects' (Glynos 53). The highly specific references to 'wrappers', 'envelopes', 'bowls', 'caskets' and 'bottles' all suggest a closed, volumetric topology at work with this relentless spatial inventory of objects 'contained'—not displayed—within the frame of the window. Conrad not only maps and locates objects as they exist in space but in turn how they themselves further enclose and delimit space with an overwhelming precision of observational detail. The wrappers are compared to 'patent medicines', the envelopes are 'closed' and 'yellow' and the bowl's colour, 'blue', as well as its material of composition, 'china', is noted and logged – as if every aspect of this symbolic space can be known.

Of course, the references to customers—'either very young men' or 'of a more mature age' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 13)—establishes the nature of this space as mercantile. However, the narrative not only maps and measures space but also commercially appraises what passes inside of it. While it is keenly noted that the customers' clothes have the appearance of being 'not very valuable' (13), more disturbingly, this exhaustive, invasive mapping penetrates beyond the mere surface appearance of lines and planes and into the very interiority of the subjects' bodies. This apprehension pierces through their clothes to reveal 'the legs inside them' which do not 'as a general rule, seem of much account either' (13). Conrad's narrative enacts a telescopic, rationalised perspective that can tunnel down

from the broad sweep of the 'large quantities' of houses, through to the assorted collection of objects contained in the window and into the interior of the subject's own corporeality. It is of no surprise that pervasive surveillance and monitoring is also wholly commensurate with the capacity of this scientifically determined matrix. In a further manifestation of Conrad's irony, even the bell above the door is shown to clatter 'behind the customer with impudent virulence' at 'the slightest provocation' (13). The space of the shop is fully comprehended and only traversable subject to detection.

While the shop is marginalised on the outer fringes of acceptable society due to the nature of its business, it is still ruthlessly governed by the same scientific and commercial constituents. The very nature of the wares proffered by Verloc, pornography, sustain these ideological considerations. Pornography entails a form of mapping that exceeds the physical geometry of the material world governed according to a scientific principle – it further involves a comprehension of the libidinal economy of the subject. Both espionage and pornography appear subversive but as is quickly revealed in the novel, Verloc's motivations are purely financial and only help to maintain the dominant ideology of capitalism. The shop itself is 'a commercial space that circulates fantasies of control' (Zimring 333) in that 'the wares protect society from subversive acts by placating desire' (334).

This operation of a rational model of full spatial apprehension is also discernible through the sequential manner in which Conrad depicts the subject's navigation within this space. Beyond the appropriately angular 'rampart of the counter', visitors then 'lift[...] up the flap at the end of the counter in order to pass into the back parlour, which g[ives] access to a passage and to a steep flight of stairs. The door [remains] the only means of entrance' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 14). Through a space rich with angles, apertures and intersecting planes—counters interlock with parlours which segue into passages and the acute angle of the stairs—the subjects' movements appear linear and logical. This elaborate construction of the symbolic in the opening pages of the novel reveals the physical, material world as being

fully mapped, gridded, and geometricised as a highly abstract, rational construct. Conrad's initial depiction of the characters' corporeality is exactly integrated into this dominant geometry of the socio-symbolic order. His brief sketches of the subjects' bodily composition are markedly rectilinear. Visitors have their 'collars turned up and hats rammed down' (14) while Winnie looks with a 'straight' glance, and her body is described as a 'rounded form' with an 'artistic arrangement' (15) of hair. Her mother is precisely 'confined to two back rooms on the first floor' (17-18) and the topology of the 'square box' of the shop is replicated in the 'small cardboard box' (14) within which Verloc packages his goods.

### **The abstract rationality of the symbolic order and its subject**

Conrad then broadens this complex construction of a rationalised symbolic reality subject to a comprehensive analytical imperative. He relocates it from the limited domain of Verloc's domestic home to a wider, more expansive terrain. This expansion is during the oft-cited sequence depicting the sham anarchist's perambulations through Hyde Park to meet Vladimir at the Russian embassy. Cedric Watts observes the 'positively attractive glow' in this scene, stating the 'fashionable and well-to-do gentry customarily displayed themselves on horseback[,] so there prevails some harmony between the aureate scene and the aureate stratum of society' ("Myth" 25) depicted within this scene. It is worth quoting at length from this sequence in order to appreciate the incisiveness of Watts' comment. It is

[t]hrough the park railings [Verloc's] glances beheld men and women riding in the Row, couples cantering past harmoniously, others advancing sedately at a walk, loitering groups of three or four, solitary horsemen looking unsociable, and solitary women [that are] followed at a long distance by a groom with a cockade to his hat and a leather belt over his tight-fitting coat. Carriages [go] bowling by, mostly two horse broughams, with here and there a victoria with

the skin of some wild beast inside and a woman's face and hat emerging above the folded hood. And a peculiarly London sun – against which nothing [can] be said except that it look[s] bloodshot – glorifie[s] all by its stare. It h[angs] at a moderate elevation above Hyde Park Corner with an air of punctual and benign vigilance. (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 19)

Watts cannily touches upon the inter-relationship between the visual composition of this 'aureate scene' and the ideological implications of it depicting the 'aureate stratum of society', while his mention of the gentry's deliberate displays subtly evinces a sense of self-conscious, unitary subjectivity. This nascent connection can be deepened through a Lacanian reading. The scene offers a highly intricate depiction of conscious, bourgeois subjectivity—Lacan's subject of science *qua* cogito explained in my introductory section—that is co-extensive with a finely calibrated, rationalised social reality. After the composition of the domestic space of Verloc's shop and its inhabitants as exhaustively mapped, gridded and geometricised, Conrad then constructs a seamlessly rational expanse of mathematically inflected social reality in Hyde Park. This 'objective' reality is formed of secure, abstract, geometrical lines and planes that crucially, however, appear co-terminous with the structure of "subjective" space that exists within it. Evidently, in a Lacanian sense, a clear distinction between the conscious subject and external reality cannot be drawn, given their fundamental inter-dependency. This intimate relationship is immediately discernible as the scene is initially focalised through Verloc's consciousness, noticeable in the phrase, 'these glances beheld'. His perception is organised through the frame of the 'park railings' and he perceives motion and stasis in a highly linear, sequential fashion. Yet this same rationalised, sequential movement also appears at work in the symbolic space external to him.

Within this sequence, the alliterative pulsation of 'railings' and 'riding in the Row'—note the straightness implied by 'Row'—and later maintained in 'bowling by' and



‘broughams’, introduces a rhythmic ordering to the motion of the subjects depicted within. This is continued by the alliterative image of ‘couples cantering past harmoniously’ which sustains the finely regulated movement. The reference to ‘harmoniously’ not only suggests that these various strands of motion and subjectivity co-exist in complementary fashion but also subtly implies a harmony internal to the couple itself – the subjects of the bourgeois marriage. This ‘harmony’ is present also in those ‘advancing sedately’ or ‘loitering’ – motion is comfortable, rational and effortless as the members of this well-to-do, ‘aureate’, stratum of society consciously present themselves to one another. Even the naming of the location of ‘Hyde Park Corner’ encodes a reference to an abstract, orthogonal structure dependent upon geometry.

Further, this precisely configured, rationalised network of physical motion extends to the geometricised depiction of the ‘peculiarly London sun’, which is defined by suggestively mathematical coordinates. It ‘h[angs]’ at a notably quantifiable, ‘moderate elevation’ with a measurably ‘punctual [...] vigilance’. This sun appears to be the spatial fulcrum of the scene. It is the fulcrum of a globalised, imperialist space, which, fundamentally, ‘glorifi[es] all by its stare’ – tacitly endorsing the structure of the subject within its matrix. This glorification appears to both validate and sustain the ideological vectors of bourgeois subjectivity and movement operating within this abstract, geometricised socio-symbolic space. This section is exceptionally similar to a sequence in *Lord Jim*. There, a certain model of subjectivity—the subject of desire—is co-extensive with the dominant symbolic system comprised of this same abstract rationalism, discernible when Jim keeps watch on the bridge of the *Patna* examined in my previous chapter. Just as much as Jim’s subjectivity appears Cartesian in nature—unitary, conscious yet constituted within a finely calibrated symbolic reality—so too does Verloc’s during his walk in the park. This connection can be elucidated through Lacan’s identification of an abstract rationalism that predominantly constitutes symbolic reality. His

identification also distinguishes a singular mode of subjectivity as being co-extensive to the system.

It is important to establish that this subject is not reducible to being an effect of the symbolic system. This qualification is important for the mapping of a Lacanian analysis onto *The Secret Agent* as it demonstrates Lacan's 'perseverance toward retaining the concept of the subject' (Dolar, "Cogito" 12). As mentioned at the start of this section, the cogito (the subject of science) is a subjective structure that is inextricable from and co-terminous with a rational model of social reality. They are mutually enabling – in the sense that 'the subject of science is the subject that makes science possible as the mathematical study of nature' (Grigg 138) and, conversely, that 'science continues to strengthen [this subject position] even further' (Lacan, *Écrits* 855). This is an acutely necessary consideration to make. Lacan's subject of science cannot be reduced to a mere effect of a symbolic system or to 'a "nonsubjective"' structure as opposed to the subject's self-apprehension' (Dolar, "Cogito" 13) – a move that a classically structuralist reading might be tempted to assert. As Mladen Dolar states, Lacan firmly rejects 'a nonsubjective "'symbolic"' dimension of which the subject is but an effect, an epiphenomenon, and which is necessarily overlooked in the subject's imaginary self-understanding' (13). Therefore, despite identifying a mathematically inflected, rationalised socio-symbolic reality at work in *The Secret Agent*, this does not eclipse the existence of the subject within it.

Conrad presents Verloc in manner highly reminiscent of Lacan's subject of science, the 'radical affirmation of human rationality' (Nobus, "Matter" 94) and ostensibly fully self-present *cogito*. This is evident as he coolly contemplates the mathematically inflected scene of Hyde Park Corner, in which 'he survey[s] through the park railings the evidences of the town's opulence and luxury with an approving eye' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 19). The composition of this scene, partly focalised through Verloc's perspective, appears commensurate with the subject of science *qua cogito* outlined by Hal Foster. Foster asserts

that this 'subject is addressed as the master of the object arrayed and focused as an image for him or her positioned at a geometral point of viewing' (139). Appropriately, Verloc looks through the railings—a suitable, structuring 'frame' for the scene, partitioning the space—with an 'approving' eye. It is here that the Lacanian critique of this subject becomes very suggestive. Hal Foster argues that Lacan 'challenges the old privilege of the subject in sight and self-consciousness[,] as well as the old mastery of the subject in representation' (138). Lacan refers to this structure as 'this belong to me aspect of representations, so reminiscent of property' (Lacan, *Four Concepts* 81) and Foster asserts that this structure 'empowers the Cartesian subject' (139). Conrad's depiction of Verloc here appears indicative of Lacan's structure of the falsely unitary Cartesian subject of science. His 'approving eye' could be reflective of the 'belong to me' nature of the representation – one through which, Foster suggests, 'the subject is addressed as the master of the object arrayed and focused as an image for him' (139). A stronger correlation may be drawn between the notion of ownership and property that Lacan states underlies the Cartesian subject when Verloc specifically muses upon how this gentrified class's ownership of property must be protected. Verloc affirms that they 'had to be protected; and their horses, carriages, houses, servants had to be protected; and the source of their wealth had to be protected in the heart of the city' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 19). Here, Conrad's scene appears to exemplify structures of Cartesian space and its correlate subjectivity in a symbolic reality that is defined by its finely calibrated, geometrically abstract social space and the experiential space of the subject within it.

In this sequence of *The Secret Agent*, then, rather than one, we see multiple subjects all constituted within an intricate configuration of a rationalised space that is ultimately subordinated to the dominant capitalist ideology of the imperialist project. Interestingly, Josiane Paccuad-Huguet aligns this scene of bourgeois social reality with the Lacanian real *qua* gaze, locating its presence in the 'London sun'. She suggests that the 'bloodshot' sun 'is only too material, as if loaded with intentionality: what should be a hollow point in space is

[...] a hint of the real thing underlying this semblance of quiet enjoyment protected by invisible bureaucratic powers' (Paccuad-Huguet, "Economies Gaze" 3). What could the form of the Lacanian real be at this juncture – what elision or absence could be enacted in order to sustain this configuration of the subject and a symbolic reality which glistens with an 'atmosphere of powdered old gold' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 17)? It is tempting to suggest that the 'bloodshot' sun here is indicative of the exhaustion of the Cartesian paradigm of a rationalised, fully comprehensible space. Perhaps it is also an anticipatory gesture towards the eventual expiration of this spatial system and of the global system of repressive colonial dominance predicated upon it.

A further parallel between *The Secret Agent* and *Lord Jim* exists in Conrad's depiction of Jim's movement in the *Patna* sequence. Jim is shown to 'glance [...] idly' and stretch with a 'leisurely twist' of his body in the 'very excess of well-being' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 13) – which is remarkably similar to Conrad's configuration of the subjects' movement in *The Secret Agent*. Here, they 'advanc[e] sedately', 'loiter' and 'canter [...] harmoniously' under a 'benign' sun, suggesting a similar kinetic ease amid the luxuriance of their mathematically constituted, capitalist existence. In much the same way that the symbolic space of *Lord Jim* suggests complicity between capitalism, imperialism and Cartesianism, so too does the symbolic reality of *The Secret Agent*. This complicity finds very specific form in the latter novel's engagement with the Prime Meridian. Stephen Ross helps specify this connection. He argues that the 'chief importance' of this structure's 'temporal and spatial (re)organization lies in its facilitation of the capitalist imperatives of efficient trade, rationalized production, and standardized schedules' (Ross 154). In other words, Cartesian-Newtonian space—utilised in the systems of longitude and latitude—is used to maintain and expand the reaches of capitalism as it is the most effective means of facilitating the logic of the commercial.

To elaborate, through the mechanics of the Cartesian and Newtonian model, space becomes a 'uniform system of abstract linear coordinates' (Jay 52), and is no longer

heterogenous, mystified or unable to be manipulated by the subject. One example of these mechanics is evidenced in the 'grid formed by latitude and longitude', which makes 'space smooth, fungible, and comprehensive by imposing order on an otherwise chaotic environment' (Warf 55). It is this 'order', alongside the rational self-presence of the Cartesian subject, the *cogito*, which enables 'capitalist imperatives' to be most fully realised. The highly abstract rationalism inherent in the Cartesian-Newtonian conception of space allows this space to be efficiently quantified. This rationalism enables a segmentation and measurement of space and motion that only embeds and refines the movement of goods and services easily around a uniform, seamless environment. The symbiosis is so compelling that it is 'no accident that the Cartesian model ar[ises] in tandem with capitalism, colonialism and modern science' (Warf 53). This complicity is also appropriately encoded into the 'peculiarly London sun' of the Hyde Park sequence in the novel. Paul Crosthwaite suggests that this celestial sphere is incorporated into a 'subtle chain of associations that runs through the novel [which] establishes the distant bodies and constellations of the celestial realm as analogues for the vast and inscrutable networks of the capitalist world system' ("Anticipations" 338).

However, it is important to acknowledge that both Conrad and Lacan do not fully dismiss the viability of Cartesian space, albeit to markedly varying degrees. Given Conrad's corrosively ironic treatment of this spatial model, it would appear feasible to suggest that the author has profound reservations as to its value, beyond Cartesian space offering the utility of movement and trade so integral to Conrad's own choice of career prior to becoming a novelist. His pessimism seems to stem from his perception—evident in *The Secret Agent*—that the system constituting this spatial model has encroached upon human imagination to a nullifying extent. By contrast—considering the subject's consciousness can be located in Cartesian space—it can be argued that Lacan believes this space is viable on the precondition of acknowledging its inevitable aporias and fissures due to the ruptures engendered by the effects of the real. Indeed, it is in the later Lacan's model where he sees that the 'symbolic

structure is by now open and in contact with the Real [on] a universal level' (Chiesa 116), and, by recognising the subject is in excess of the ego and this space, its viability remains.

Returning to the text, even as Verloc steps into the street of the embassy, the materiality and structure of socio-symbolic space resonates with a sense of the philosophical architecture of Cartesian metaphysics and the 'Newtonian belief in the homogeneity of time and space' (M. Turner 125). Indeed, while there remain some differences between Newton's and Descartes' concept of the "material" or "materiality", the similarities are easily sufficient for these theories to be designated a 'Cartesian-Newtonian concept of matter' ("Matter"). The homogeneity of matter would therefore be a product of the 'strictly uniform mathematical world, [the] world of geometry made real' (Koyré, *Closed World* 100-101) of Descartes. In this world, Descartes asserts 'the nature of matter [...] consists not in its being something which is hard or heavy or coloured[,] but simply in its being [a substance] which is extended in length, breadth and depth' (190). The residence of a social elite, Knightsbridge, is described as having the 'majesty of inorganic nature, of matter that never dies' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 21) and down this street Verloc notices a 'thick police constable' who appears to be a 'part of inorganic nature, surging apparently out of a lamp-post' (21). These brief sketches harbour connotations of a uniformity of matter, and of material being reducible to a homogenous, undifferentiated mass. Lamp-post, building, street or policeman: all are composed of a uniform matter according to a uniform law and it becomes increasingly apparent that the dominant symbolic space and its co-extensive subjectivity may be Cartesian and Newtonian in nature. The policeman, composed of the same matter as the lamp-post, further enacts the imperative Lacan identifies at the heart of the scientific enterprise, which is the compulsive analytical impetus examining any object constituted within its field of enquiry.

One can detect, of course, ripples of consciously discernible inconsistencies in the socio-symbolic order. A particular example of the frequently referenced 'topographical

mysteries' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 21) of social space is the numerical discordance Verloc notices as he approaches the embassy. He observes how one house 'rationally enough b[ears] the number 9' and that 'the other [is] numbered 37; but the fact that this last belong[s] to Porthill Street' (21) disturbs the consistency of the numbering. Yet inconsistencies of this kind can be consciously rectified and retroactively assimilated into the symbolic order through its ideological operation. This is highlighted in the narrative by Conrad, as all that is required is an act of Parliament 'compelling those edifices to return to where they belong' (21). This example is the same level of symbolic functioning evidenced when the embassy officials demand the 'bringing to light of a distinct significant fact[,], an alarming fact' (23) – facts manufactured via and positioned according to political aims. This maneuver is what Žižek designates '[o]ne of the fundamental stratagems of ideology' ("Spectre" 64). It is the 'reference to some –self-evidence...““Let the facts speak for themselves”’ is perhaps the arch-statement of ideology-the point being precisely, that facts never ““speak for themselves””, but are always made to speak by a network of discursive devices' (64).

Indeed, *The Secret Agent* is a novel that explicitly discusses and debates the nature of the factual; of history and political ideology via characters such as Vladimir, Michaelis *et al.* Even Chief Inspector Heat consciously observes that in the 'close-woven stuff of relations between conspirator and police there occur unexpected solutions of continuity, sudden holes in space and time' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 69) but this comment is in reference to the conscious work of police surveillance. It is at a much deeper, latent level of the text—beyond character dialogue that explicitly addresses facts and ideology—where questions as to the tectonic coherence of the mathematically determined symbolic order can be drawn. These are questions that further emerge during Verloc's famously uncomfortable and somewhat humiliating grilling at the hands of the *arriviste* official, Vladimir.

After a suitably linear tour of the embassy, where Verloc is 'led along a ground-floor

passage to the left of the great carpeted staircase [and] suddenly motioned to enter a quite small room' (22), the secret agent meets the recently installed diplomat. Stephen Ross argues that the Russian's impressively 'linguistic and dialectic range indicates the deterritorialized position Vladimir represents' (155) in the novel, while Con Coroneos considers his formidable grasp of languages an expression of a 'lack of authenticity' (56). It is feasible, however, to suggest that the 'polymorphous nationality' (Ross 155) of Vladimir is in fact because Conrad deploys him as a composite character, representative of many of the dominant beliefs of the European intellectual elite. Conrad clearly states that he is 'something of a favourite in society' (*Secret Agent* 24), illustrating the social strata in which he circulates. He is later seen in conversation with that 'great lady' of the 'most influential and distinguished connections' (82) to whom the Assistant Commissioner is grateful, and his mastery of several European languages as well as his 'drawing room reputation' (24) both testify to an elite education and background. It is this erudite figure with his intellectual certitudes that becomes subject to corrosively ironic treatment by Conrad.

Indeed, Vladimir exemplifies many of the traits that are reflective of Lacan's structure of the subject of science. This subject is 'a synonym for human rationality, mental power and the certainty of a continuous experience of thought' (Nobus, "Matter" 94) – a structure that is distinguishable as the prevalent subjective structure in the text. He talks to Verloc on the beliefs of the English middle classes 'as if delivering a scientific lecture' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 32), and offers the observation that 'property seems to them an indestructible thing (33). Further, he comments on the continental political meetings of the 'Milan Conference' (33), art, ideology and, of course, science itself. During this sequence, it becomes apparent that Vladimir speaks as if he occupies an extra-ideological position. For Lacan, it is almost as if he has a grasp of the 'world conceived of as the whole' which is predicated upon 'a view, a gaze, or an imaginary hold' (*Encore* 43). This perspective is the 'view of a sphere from the outside, as it were-as if the world were over there, and [the subject is] here looking at it from *some*



*privileged outside point* [italics in original]' (Fink, "Knowledge" 174). One may perhaps even suggest the view of a sphere constituted by such mathematical operations as the circles comprising the Meridian project, where a scientific system enables an external, detached analysis of the very space the subject is situated within.

This totalising view of the world is demonstrative of Lacan's subject of science *qua cogito*, and Vladimir is certainly correct when he asserts that the 'sacrosanct fetish of today is science' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 32), if the emphasis is placed on the religious implications of 'sacrosanct'. In Lacanian thought, the subject of science's 'faith is invariably placed in the historically constituted social environment' (Glynos 58) which has supplanted religion's primacy. Now, therefore, 'God has many names' (Glynos 58) – what was previously religious faith is presently directed towards the ostensible certitude of science itself. It is a point of unacknowledged irony that Vladimir exemplifies this self-same belief in science as the English middle classes he critiques, but his belief is directed rather at its intellectual foundations in mathematics. It is in a throwaway comment to Verloc that this composite representative of European erudition inadvertently reveals what is, in a Lacanian interpretation, a subjective position predicated upon the structure of the 'Other of the Other [*qua*] Name-of-the-Father' (Chiesa 107). Vladimir casually remarks that 'since bombs are your means of expression, it would be really telling if one could throw a bomb into pure mathematics. But that is impossible' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 34) and he continues to his suggestion of blowing up the Royal Observatory, home to the First Meridian. Clearly, the importance of the Royal Observatory is considerable. It is the physical embodiment of the 'centralization of the world's time via the Greenwich Meridian' which 'effectively define[s] London as the centre of nineteenth-century global capitalism' (Eyeington 120). The bombing is thus aimed at the 'nineteenth-century English bourgeoisie's crowning glory' (121) and its destruction would inarguably damage imperial prestige.

However, this acknowledgement ignores the point that the discourse—mathematical physics—which constitutes the Meridian system is perceived as inviolable by this highly educated diplomat. It is Conrad's construction of abstract symbolic space—from the infallible and comprehensive apprehension of rationalised space in Verloc's shop through to the seamless operation of the geometrically secure social space of the park—that is predicated upon the apparently inviolable mechanics of this intellectual system. Vladimir's plan involves the destruction of the building that represents the Meridian structure as he believes the abstract system underlying it is impregnable. In Lacanian theory, this belief exemplifies the notion that 'the Name-of-the-Father encircles all other signifiers [and] seems to posit the existence of a self-enclosed and fully independent symbolic Other' (Chiesa 108). As discussed in my first chapter, the Name of the Father/Other of the Other is a presupposed structural position within the symbolic that guarantees the security of the symbolic order. It is Vladimir's reference to the impossibility of breaching 'pure mathematics' that enables mathematics to be identified as functioning as the Other of the Other *qua* Name-of-the-Father; the 'fundamental signifier which permits signification to proceed normally' (Evans 122) and the 'fundamental metaphor on which all signification depends' (140-41) in the symbolic order. In this instance, it is the foundational element which enables the rest of the system to appear to operate without disruption.

### **There is no 'Other of the Other': aporias in the symbolic**

Brian Rotman enables the constitutive fabric of this 'Other of the Other' to be accurately diagnosed. It is his critique of the dominant model of mathematics that illuminates the views espoused by Vladimir. This dominant model is the Platonic, realist philosophy of mathematics which offers an 'ideal timeless world populated by abstract unchanging objects'

(Rotman 30). This realist philosophy ‘contends that mathematical objects –points, lines, numbers, spaces, functions, surfaces – exist in some ideal realm independently of any human presence, activity or knowledge’ (107). Further, this view is ‘prevalent among mathematicians, scientists, and the general population [and] it is a belief strongly and confidently upheld’ (107). Interestingly, Rotman sees this perspective as the ‘prevailing orthodoxy in mathematics’ which, contemporaneously in regards to Conrad, is a ‘creation of [the] nineteenth century [philosophy of] realism’ (30). Surely it is a belief in this ‘ideal realm’ as a referent comprising ‘abstract unchanging objects’ that Vladimir himself refers to through his assertion that it is ‘impossible’ to ‘throw a bomb into pure mathematics’ (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 34) – Vladimir defers instinctively to the idea this locus exists ‘independently of any human presence’. This belief in the ‘Other of the Other’, a secure structural position that guarantees the full unity of symbolic reality, is of course rejected by Lacan, who identifies that, in fact, the symbolic order is penetrated by the real. In the Lacanian model, the ‘presence of the Real [is] in the open structure of the Symbolic’ (Chiesa 119), where the ‘Real stands for that which cannot be symbolized: but now this impossibility is inherent to the Symbolic’ (122) proposing that any symbolic system cannot achieve a full self-unity.

The implication of this idea for the role of mathematics in *The Secret Agent* is two-fold. Firstly, the question remains as to what is the actual nature and status of ‘pure mathematics’ for Conrad, if it is not this immutable referent or repository of ‘abstract unchanging objects’ (Rotman 30). Its nature is perhaps, instead, one of being a referent that is actually a ‘social historical construct’ (31). Rotman suggests that despite the ‘fact that it might present itself as abstract, cognitively universal, presemiotic (as is the case for mathematical objects), it will be no more timeless, spaceless or subjectless than any other social artifact’ (31) – thus subject to change, rupture or disintegration. Conrad’s figuration of socio-symbolic reality so far delineated in the novel—the full analytical quantification of space evidenced in Verloc’s shop, the functioning of subjectivity according to geometrical

laws detectable in the Hyde Park sequence—is constituted by the ostensibly flawless system of rationalism *qua* mathematics. Secondly, therefore, the Lacanian theory that ‘there is no Other of the Other’ substantiated by Rotman’s arguments suggests that in fact this apparently totalising discourse may have inherent aporias and disruptive fissures which can only be discerned via their absence within the text. This is surely a hitherto undetected level of irony that Conrad imbricates into the novel. The arrogant convictions of Vladimir are subtly but ruthlessly undermined by Conrad – even the presupposed intellectual foundations guaranteeing reality are ironically destabilised, removing any chance of purchase for the reader to gain a secure authorial vantage point.

It is no accident that after Vladimir’s speech to Verloc, in which he displays a markedly totalising world-view on society and ideology, Conrad portrays other characters who articulate a similarly all-encompassing philosophical discourse but from the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. Most notably, the ‘ticket-of-leave apostle’ (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 39), Michaelis, manifests in his speech to the other anarchists the same structural tendencies as Conrad’s other subject of science, Vladimir. Michaelis waxes lyrical on the whole of history and society, how the ‘economic condition of the world [is] responsible for the past and shaping the future; the source of all history, of all ideas, guiding the mental development of mankind’ (41). In one sense this tendency may signal the influence of Newtonian mechanics as considered by Martha A. Turner, who remarks that ‘a mechanistic conception of the universe seems to be held in common by most of the major characters’ (120). Specifically, here it appears as ‘Michaelis seeks to render the world humanly intelligible by finding in it a mechanism that accounts for his situation’ (120). It is also, however, a perspective that pointedly reflects the Lacanian notion that the subject of science is ‘looking at [the world] from *some privileged outside point* [italics in original]’ (Fink, “Knowledge” 174).

What becomes highly suggestive is that bracketed between these two apparently articulate, oratorical speakers Conrad situates the mute figure of Stevie. Referring back to the

opening of the novel, he is the one character subtly misaligned with its finely calibrated symbolic coordinates, and Conrad inscribes a spatial disjunction between the subject of Stevie and the rationalism of social reality. Stevie is 'easily diverted from the straight path of duty' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 16) and his physical demeanor jars with the linear, sequential depiction of other characters' appearances and behaviours. This disjuncture is evidenced in Stevie's 'droop of the lower lip' (16), his vocal 'stutter' (17) when speaking and his noticeable 'squint' (17). He is also depicted as spatially displaced, as 'poor Stevie ha[s] forgotten his address – for a time' (17). Further, the first eventful recollection of his history refers to his disruption of a capitalist enterprise when he 'let[s] off fireworks on the staircase' (17) of an office which results in 'choking clerks' and 'elderly businessmen' (17) evacuating the building. It is interesting then, that in contrast to the florrid discourse of Vladimir and Michaelis, Stevie is presented as silently 'drawing circles, circles, circles; innumerable circles, concentric, eccentric; a coruscating whirl of circles that by their tangled multitude of repeated curves, uniformity of form, and confusion of intersecting lines suggest[...] a rendering of cosmic chaos' (42).

Carola Kaplan proposes that this image—one of 'repetition' ("No Refuge" 143)—is one of the many ways that 'Conrad depicts the effects of the intrusion of the Real into the symbolic order' (142). While 'effects' is appropriate, given that the real 'subsists outside [of] symbolization' (Lacan, *Écrits* 324) and language, I would suggest that Stevie's actions contain a more polyvalent significance to Conrad's concerns in the text. His mute, inarticulate sketching of circles actually destabilises the very notion of the centre that is of such import to the discourse of rationalism *qua* mathematics present in the novel and the physics of the Meridian project. For example, the specificity of overlapping 'concentric' circles—those with a fixed centre—and 'eccentric' circles which are those without, problematises the very role and fixity of the centre and periphery. Indeed, Bruce Fink observes that Lacan refers to a recurring idea in the Western metaphysical tradition of the 'fantasy of the perfection of the

sphere' ("Knowledge" 171) in which there is an impulse towards keeping 'entirely intact the notions of centre and periphery' (171).

Accordingly, Lacan states that the subject's 'world view [...] remains perfectly spherical' (*Encore* 42). He argues that the 'center of a sphere is assumed' to 'constitute [its] pivotal point'. As such, 'changing this pivotal point, of having it be occupied by the earth or the sun, involves nothing that in itself subverts what the signifier "center" intrinsically [...] preserves' (*Encore* 42). The centre and periphery both remain fixed, stable positions that the subject can contemplate and look upon. Is this fixed, spherical world-view perhaps not only present in Vladimir's and Michaelis' subjective discourses but also articulated in the grandiose science of the Meridian project, where 'the great circle of Greenwich meridian is the zero from which space is measured and time is clocked. From Greenwich zero, terrestrial longitudes are reckoned, and what are these when mapped but concentric circles?' (Stallman 103). If so, then Stevie's circles that suggest 'cosmic chaos' unsettle the theoretical spatial certainty generated by the Meridian circles which circumscribe the globe, and disrupt its conceptual aspiration for a fully closed, apprehended, capitalist space.

Even Vladimir's and Michaelis' arguments, while differing in content, reveal the same structural frame as each other as they both rely on rationalism and logic. Both of them are derived from the self-same mathematical system that governs the Meridian project and the socio-symbolic order of the text. And, as mentioned earlier, it is significant that, in a novel so concerned with space, their rationally constituted, totalising proclamations are physically proximate within the material of the text—a few pages apart—and close to Stevie's silent depiction of the problems inherent in the structuration of their discourse. Conrad's geometrical warping through Stevie's 'confusion of intersecting lines' strongly resonates within the symbolic reality of the text, considering it is a symbolic reality that so frequently foregrounds the 'harmoniously' intersecting lines and movement of a secure geometrical system seen in Verloc's shop, his walk through the park and in other moments. Equally, were

Stevie's silent sketches the only image problematising and destabilising the idea of the centre and of a mathematical system aspiring to a full encompassment of space then this interpretation could feasibly be dismissed. However, this brief moment of a mentally disabled man drawing a 'tangled multitude' of lines at the top of the stairs arguably only presages his later corporeal evisceration in the explosion. Further, the immediate narrative leap forward to after the explosion at the start of chapter four structurally generates the absence of the central event in the narrative.

Prior to Conrad's introduction of Heat and the immediate aftermath of the explosion, however, Conrad sketches the background to the event within the anarchist fraternity through Ossipon's and the Professor's meeting. This meeting further reveals the intellectual tendencies of Lacan's subject of science. It is tempting to assign a similar sense of spherical certitude and self-presence to the Professor's 'right hand [that] close[s] round the india-rubber ball' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 56) of his bomb, intimating a scientifically determined mechanism in which the subject appears in utter control of the symbolic system that created it. The material of India rubber itself is, unsurprisingly, a product of colonial manufacture originating from South America but developed for commercial manufacture in Calcutta in the 1870s, so that even the professed anarchist's means of subversion are dependent on the colonial economy. His explanation of it functioning in a rational, logical manner—that the 'pressing of this ball actuates a detonator inside the flask I carry in my pocket. It's the principle of the pneumatic instantaneous shutter for a camera lens' (56)—is keenly reflective of a formulaic mechanism that can be reducible to a uniform law or operation.

Even the Professor, as the self-styled ideological outsider of the text, works within the same theoretical, rational parameters as the other characters who seek instead to maintain the ideological *status-quo* of the dominant social reality. Just as much as Vladimir relies on the ideality of an abstract mathematical realm free from the vicissitudes of mutable existence, so too does the Professor. Only for him it is articulated through his contemplation

of a 'perfectly precise mechanism. A really intelligent detonator' (57). Such is the import of this concept that he repeats it to Ossipon in response to the question of what he wants—a 'perfect detonator' (58)—and reiterates it a moment later, when he states, 'I was thinking of my perfect detonator only' (58). Encoded into this initially disturbing desire is a similar reliance on what Rotman refers to as an 'ideal timeless world populated by abstract unchanging objects' (30) – an aspiration predicated on the same system of 'pure mathematics' that determines the fabric of the symbolic system, so that in his scientific aspirations the Professor 'remains imaginatively committed to a conceptual framework grounded on Newtonian ideals' (M. Turner 121). Feasibly, then, when Ossipon, annoyed, suggests to the Professor that he is 'too transcendental' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 61), it might be a latent irony that remains unseen until viewed in conjunction with a Platonic mathematical ideality.

When the Professor reveals to Ossipon his construction of the bomb, it is articulated in terms reminiscent of the earlier spatial scrutiny of Verloc's wares in the first chapter. Clearly, these terms reinforce the analytical impetus at work in social reality. They also support the notion that even the Professor is constituted by the same dominant, uniform system governed by the same mathematically influenced imperatives as every other subject – contrary to his repeated declarations that he 'stands free from everything artificial' (57). He describes the 'old one-gallon copal varnish can' from which he has to 'cut out the bottom first and solder it on again afterwards [and how] the can enclose[s] a wide-mouthed, well-corked jar of thick glass packed round with some wet clay' (63). This quantification and manipulation of space accords precisely with the coordinates of an abstract, rationalised symbolic order where every object can be fully analysed.



### The explosion as real *qua* trauma

With the introduction of Chief Inspector Heat in the narrative, Conrad demarcates the closest point of the symbolic order to the fundamental rupture of the explosion and the death of Stevie. As Heat converses with the local constable, he elicits from the junior policeman his recollection of having seen ‘something like a heavy flash of lightening in the fog’ (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 70) and feeling a ‘concussion’ which makes him ‘tingle all over’ (70). This most cursory outline is the limit of what Conrad reveals of the blast, so that the ‘disappearance of this half-witted boy is the central event of the novel, but it is never directly described’, as it ‘remains hidden, a blank space in the center of the narrative’ (Miller 51). In light of this comment, it is convincing to designate this central absence as an eruption of the Lacanian real *qua* trauma. It has no discernible, positive textual presence in the same way Jim’s jump from the *Patna* is absent from the narrative – both are the crucial, central moments that the narratives hinge upon and both are textually absent and temporally disruptive. Given the destabilising of the concept of the centre and the suggestion of spatial aporias in the meridian’s system of mapping that Stevie’s previous drawing of chaotic circles hints at, the implications of the real—‘what resists symbolisation absolutely’ (Lacan, *Freud’s Papers* 66)—for the various systems of the symbolic order are multiple in scope.

It is helpful then to refer again to Cathy Caruth’s work on trauma to elucidate the parameters of the explosion and its impact upon the matrices of the text. The explosion does not necessarily conform to the conventional, formal qualities of Caruth’s model – there is not one specific subject who experiences the trauma and survives as Stevie is obliterated, and therefore there is no ‘breach in the mind’s experience of time, self and the world’ (Caruth 4). It is possible, however, were we to tentatively extend its theoretical bounds, to envisage the

blast as a trauma to the body of the text itself; a trauma to the symbolic order and to the body of abstract rationalism and mathematics which governs this figuration of socio-symbolic reality. In *Lord Jim*, the trauma of the real—Jim’s jump—is localised and individual to the subjectivity of Jim himself. However, in *The Secret Agent*, the traumatic event, the explosion, is structural in scope, more a systemic trauma to a dominant conceptual paradigm. Clearly, the blast is a trauma on a literal level, insofar as it can physically rupture a material object or spatial field, but it is also demonstrative of a breach in the dominant intellectual system of Cartesian rationalism. Further, it also represents a disruption in the inter-subjective network of communication as will be explored presently. Through the lens of this theoretical model one can discern how the socio-symbolic order comes to terms with this trauma of an absent centre, and the conceptual procedures activated to limit its damage to the dominant ideology. As referred to in my previous chapter, it is at this juncture that ‘the most prominent measure of the symbolic damage wrought by any historical event is the extent to which ideological resources have been mobilized to domesticate, cover over, or “suture” its impact’ (Crosthwaite, *Trauma* 26).

This reference to ‘suture’ is greatly resonant. It is a term etymologically connected to the medical procedure of surgical stitching to a wound or trauma of the body. It is the very term that Lacan employs when he outlines the procedures of scientific rationality that attempt to ‘suture the subject of science’ (Lacan, *Écrits* 731). In Lacanian thought, the ‘effort to suture the Cartesian subject of science within modern scientific practices can now also be understood as a sustained endeavor to control and evaluate all knowledge’ (Nobus, “Matter” 100). This attempt would enable the subject of science to exist within a ‘complete Other, a finally closed symbolic system’ (Verhaeghe 137). As I discussed in my earlier chapter on *Almayer’s Folly*, the Lacanian subject is, at its most fundamental level, a split subject – a subject that is ‘caught up in a constituting division’ which is a ‘division between knowledge and truth’ (Lacan, *Écrits* 727). Of course, the ‘split’ is between knowledge, the conscious

product of the *cogito*, and truth or cause, which in the Lacanian model ‘always refers to a human being’s incapacity to master all knowledge owing to [...] the level of the unconscious’ (Nobus, “Matter” 99). Two questions then arise in regards to *The Secret Agent* – what is the nature of this truth and how does the subject of science seek to ‘suture’ over this breach within its symbolic field?

The ‘truth’ that takes the form of the trauma to the dominant conceptual paradigm of rational and mathematical-scientific knowledge at work in Conrad’s construction of social reality, can now be located in the failure of this rationalism to offer a fully unified, utter encompassment of space and subjectivity. In a discourse that asserts a full comprehension of symbolic reality as mapped, gridded and geometricised, the central absence of Stevie’s death and the explosion is testament to a systemic failure in this aspiration. It is this ‘truth’ or ‘cause that modern science and mathematics [attempt to] evacuate in their attempt to reduce everything to a (static) structure that is Whole’, to ‘suture’ over this ‘cause whose proper status is that of a disruption, of the failure of the structure to include everything’ (Glynos 72). Stevie’s unnoticed, silent sketches of a confusion of geometrical form amid the vociferous theorising of the anarchists are an appropriate foreshadowing of this latent truth that manifests itself only through the central ‘disruption’ of the blast. It is, in a sense, an ‘unconscious’ trauma – given its physical absence from the body of the text. In this perspective, it accords with Caruth’s argument that trauma ‘addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. It is a truth [which] remains unknown in our very actions and our language’ (Caruth 4). As suggested, in the novel it takes the form of an aporia within the dominant conceptual paradigm of an abstract rationalism indebted to mathematics.

Obviously, this concept is not a prophetic declaration of mathematical theory’s future direction. However, Conrad’s figuration of a mathematically inflected analytical model that fails to achieve a full self-unity does suggestively prefigure some of the later developments in

twentieth-century philosophy. Specifically, in the case of mathematics, it subtly hints towards the work of thinkers such as Kurt Gödel and his incompleteness theorem. Lacan actually utilises Gödel's work (*Écrits* 731) to illustrate the 'failed attempt to foreclose the symbolic Other and suture the subject [which is] what mathematics effectively acknowledges in Gödel's theorems of 1931' (Glynos 63). The principle suggests that 'a complete theory cannot be consistent [and] a consistent theory cannot be complete' (Verhaeghe 125). These ideas then might be the various aspects of the 'truth' that the symbolic agencies in *The Secret Agent* must cover over and, as Crosthwaite observes, it now falls to illuminate the nature and scope of the 'ideological resources' (*Trauma* 26) activated within the symbolic order to achieve this end.

Conrad situates Chief Inspector Heat, an appropriate agent of the ruling ideology, as starting 'immediately his investigation on the spot' (*Secret Agent* 70). This 'spot' is the zero point of the symbolic's attempt to 'domesticate' the event. It is interesting that the remains of Stevie's body are described in terms suggestive of Lacan's—ones he uses to outline a form of the real *qua* pure materiality—which further supports the interpretation of the explosion as the eruption of the real within the textual body. Heat's eyes are shown to search 'the gruesome detail of that heap of mixed things' (70) and can only perceive it as a 'heap of nameless fragments' (71). This sense of an utter disintegration of form, and of matter unable to be rationally integrated into a symbolic configuration of meaning, accords with the Lacanian notion of the real *qua* 'material substrate underlying the imaginary and the symbolic' orders (Evans 163). This real is a form of 'the body in its brute physicality' (163). In fact, Heat's inability to fully conceive of the scope of this 'shattering violence of destruction' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 71) leads him to glimpse the lack in the symbolic order itself. He sees this lack as the 'inexplicable mysteries of conscious existence beset Chief Inspector Heat till he evolve[s] a horrible notion that ages of atrocious pain and mental torture could be contained between two successive winks of an eye' (71). The deliberate mention of

‘conscious existence’ intimates reasoned, quantifiable knowledge, and the unsettling of this rational process may reflect the structural position the subject of science experiences when they ‘come up against the limits of the symbolic [order]’ (Glynos 71). As this occurs, the subject ‘[o]ccasionally’ might ‘catch a glimpse of the lack in the Other. It is this void that is filled with totalizing fantasies, with fantasies of the Whole, of a complete Other. In mathematics, these fantasies find expression in the foundationalisms of Platonism’ (71).

The symbolic disintegration of the body and mystification of rational comprehension in Heat’s subjectivity—this ‘void’—is quickly ‘filled’ by Conrad. Compellingly, this substantiation is achieved through a component derived from the ‘totalizing fantas[y]’ of a mathematically influenced system of spatial comprehension. It is through the appearance and appropriation of a secure geometrical form that Heat is able to begin the ‘suturing’ of the trauma. This process starts to occur as he picks up a ‘narrow strip of velvet with a large triangular piece of dark blue cloth hanging from it’ (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 72) and then expresses a ‘startled, intense interest while he examine[s] closely the triangular piece of broadcloth’ (72). The heap of ‘mixed things’ and ‘nameless fragments’ begin to reintegrate into the symbolic order via the geometrical means of a triangle, that, as soon becomes clear, contains the address—essentially a set of spatial coordinates—of the Verlocs’ home.

The importance of the triangle to Verloc’s own subjective position in the symbolic will be examined in due course. For now, the appearance of this shape and the information it contains for Heat accelerates the process of investigation and is quickly seized upon by the Assistant Commissioner who demands to see what Heat ‘discovered on the spot’ (96). This subsequent involvement of the character of the Assistant Commissioner represents a higher echelon of the symbolic order ‘mobilized’ in reintegrating the trauma. This procedure, in conjunction with the later engagement of Sir Ethelred, perhaps exemplifies Caruth’s assertion that ‘events are only historical to the extent that they implicate others’ (18). Indeed, this implication of other subjects and symbolic agencies—the newspapers being the most

obvious—involves the assimilation of the trauma and its production into a historical event. The trauma of the absent blast, an eruption of the real, suggests that for ‘history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs [and] a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence’ (18). The ‘inaccessibility’ of the explosion is compelling. It is directly absent from the narrative and not at all ‘fully perceived’, with only the barest outline of its physical effects noted by the constable in the park.

The blast is also a trauma that disrupts the inter-subjective field of communication in the socio-symbolic reality of the novel. This is most evident in the conversation between Heat and the Assistant Commissioner. It is first apparent as the Assistant Commissioner begins his self-interested questioning of Heat as to the involvement of Michaelis to avoid incurring the displeasure of the ‘great lady’ (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 82). The effect of the questions destabilises Heat’s conscious subjectivity, delineated through an image that suggests Heat’s self-conception is dependent on the actions and reactions of an “other” subject. Heat is shown to feel ‘like a tight-rope artist might feel if suddenly, in the middle of the performance, the manager of the Music Hall were to rush out of the proper managerial seclusion and begin to shake the rope’ (90). This reference to another subject, the ‘manager’, can be likened to the ‘perpetual exteriority’ (Eyers 20) inherent in the structure of the *cogito* where it relies on the unity generated via the “other”. Heat is also forced to reveal the origins of his sources of information to his superior office and justify his usage of them. He has to defend his sources by referring to the privacy of their origin: ‘[p]rivate friendship, private information, private use of it’ (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 98), which devalues and undermines his information network as it is dependent on secret relationships. Ultimately, as Heat laments later when in conversation with Verloc, the consequences of the explosion end in the ‘laying waste of fields of knowledge, which, cultivated by a capable man, had a distinct value for the individual and for the society’ (152-153). Thus the broader repercussions of the blast disturb

the secure channel of communication between various subjects that work to preserve the socio-symbolic order.

### **The 'suture' of the real *qua* trauma**

A number of symbolic strands of Lacan's subject of science cohere within Conrad's presentation of the Assistant Commissioner. He is first seen 'ben[ding] over a table bestrewn with papers, as if worshipping an enormous double inkstand of bronze and crystal' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 77). This bureaucratic operation figured with the religiosity of 'worshipping' can be interpreted in a Lacanian sense as echoing the substitution of religion with that of rationalism, a substitution continued in the arguably Adamic depiction of the speaking tubes as 'resembling snakes' (77). Speaking tubes, a popular device in the Victorian period and early twentieth century, are an embodiment of traversable, rationalised space. They are a technology that enables coherent communication throughout a building or large physical structure – clearly a means of facilitating the Assistant Commissioner's bureaucratic function of maintaining symbolic control and order.

The initial meeting between Heat and his superior enacts this process of symbolic control as it retroactively symbolises the events leading up to the blast as Heat recounts the movements of the suspects through eyewitness accounts in a linear, rational process thus continuing its reintegration. This, alongside the Assistant Commissioner's scrutiny of the 'square piece of calico with an address on' (96), immediately leads the superior official to converse with the most senior figure Conrad situates in the narrative, Sir Ethelred, government minister in Parliament. That the means of detection used by the police officers, Chief Inspector Heat and the Assistant Commissioner, is commensurate with the scientific procedures of rationalism, and, in this case, mathematical geometry, with the ultimate aim 'to make everything explicit, accountable, subject to scientific analysis' (Belsey 91-92), is not

unique in terms of *The Secret Agent*. It has also been identified in the detective fiction of Sherlock Holmes. Belsey's interpretation of Holmes and Watson appears equally fitting in describing the procedures enacted by the detectives in Conrad's work, and how the text might 'begin in enigma, mystery, the impossible, and conclude with an explanation which makes it clear that logical deduction and scientific method render all mysteries accountable to reason' (92). The geometrical means of analysis encoded into Heat's and the Assistant Commissioner's detective methods in order to illuminate and integrate the explosion into the symbolic clearly enact the 'scientific method' referred to in Belsey's observation of Holmes and Watson. Albeit in Conrad's novel, the scientific procedure is encoded into the very fabric of the subject of science's consciousness.

In the depiction of Sir Ethelred's conference with the Assistant Commissioner, Conrad appears to heighten and amplify certain spatial and physical aspects indicative of the dominant symbolic order. This amplification reflects the fact that this 'great personage' represents one of the highest echelons of the ruling ideology and therefore an intensification and embodiment of its constitutive, spatial determinants. The density of matter and space is repeatedly evidenced through Conrad's references to the minister being '[v]ast in bulk and stature' (*Secret Agent* 102), who 'broaden[s] at the base' and 'seem[s] an expanding man' (102). Even his accoutrements appear 'expanded, too, enormous' (102) and Conrad reinforces this physicality when the 'great and expanded personage [...] expand[s] a little more' (104) during the course of the meeting. This notion of expanding space accords with the Cartesian notion of an infinite, expanding space – the *res extensa*. When articulated through the corporeal outline of a representative of the ruling ideology of rationalised, imperial power, it suggests that it is these spatial laws, subordinated to capitalism, which govern the fabric of symbolic reality in the text – a co-extensiveness between Cartesian space and imperialist ideology. Further, even the physical density of the clock is appropriately thick, solid and intensified. It is a 'heavy, glistening affair of massive scrolls in the same dark marble



of the mantelpiece' (103), a mechanism representing another form of measurement and described in terms very similar to the physical composition of the member of the political elite. The fact that it is described as 'mov[ing] through the space of seven minutes' (103) further confirms the escalation of spatial emphasis in this elite locale.

During Sir Ethelred's questioning, the Assistant Commissioner's dialogue evidences the fundamental structure of Lacan's subject of science and a symbolic reality constituted by an abstract rationalism. Firstly, this dialogue occurs in the physical setting of what Conrad refers to, when the Assistant Commissioner later returns to Sir Ethelred, as the 'very centre of the Empire' (155). This 'centre' is a suggestively precise geographical coordinate of the zero point from which the ideology of empire emanates outwards in its most essential form. Within the supreme seat of imperial power, this agent of the dominant symbolic order demarcates and circumscribes the affair, most notably, in a specifically topological manner. The Assistant Commissioner initially speaks of the incident as unique in anarchist terms, 'even if one looked into it as deep as can be' (103), and talks about what may exist 'under the surface of this affair' (104). The means of his subjective comprehension immediately assumes and activates a topological, spatial dimension in the conscious conceptualisation of the explosion. Conrad's depiction of interior, 'subjective', space appears to operate according to the same abstract rationalism that constitutes external symbolic reality evident elsewhere in the text, most notably in the Hyde Park sequence where secure lines and planes govern the subjects' movements. The reference to depth, in 'deep', and plane, in 'surface', enacts a topological orientation at work in his consciousness. This geometry intensifies as the senior officer bases this spatial perception on the 'triangular' piece of cloth discovered by Heat as a means to suture the affair. He states that this object is 'so incredible that the explanation which will account for it is bound to touch the bottom of the affair' (106). This geometrical shape is shown to be a means for the Assistant Commissioner to conceptualise and

conclusively circumscribe the event – just as it was for Heat to begin this same process earlier.

It appears that a fundamental, abstract rationalism *qua* geometry is encoded into Lacan's subject of science's—the *cogito*'s—perceptual mechanics. It elucidates the actual process and method constituting the symbolic's effort to suture the trauma. Further, this intricate procedure lies at the heart of both the subject of science's structure and illuminates a hitherto unseen aspect of the 'ideological resources' engendered and activated by the dominant, ruling elite. The latent, rationalised perceptual mechanics of the Assistant Commissioner's subjectivity illustrates how 'Descartes mechanize[s] the imagination by imprinting on [it] a number grid organized in relation to an ideal zero-zero origin point and two ideal perpendicular coordinate axes' (Rotman 100). As Descartes states, 'we should not regard order or number as anything separate from the things which are ordered and numbered' (178) – imagination can only be enacted through this numerically inflected structure. The officer's capacity to encompass the explosion through reference to 'surface' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 104), depth—in 'deep' (103)—and lowest point—in 'bottom' (106)—is predicated on this Cartesian procedure, as to delimit its circumference implies an 'origin point' from which this spatialisation can proceed. This same process is found in the Meridian system: the longitudinal coordinates of the Meridian operation require a zero point—Greenwich—through which to orientate and sustain their own coherence. These procedures are a further example of the deeper level of Conradian irony inscribes into the novel. It is a reductive, rationalised process of subjective computation that governs the very parameters of thought. And it is the validity and effectiveness of these parameters that is mercilessly undermined by Conrad via the aporias and caesuras discernible in the text.

The piece of cloth taken from the 'spot' (70, 96) of the explosion enables the coordinate axes to define the 'surface', 'depth' and 'bottom' of the symbolic rupture. What was an eruption of the real—a central absence—is retroactively sutured by the imposition

and coordination of a Cartesian spatial system. The fragment of Stevie's coat is thus encoded as the 'zero-zero point' in this latent, diagrammatic conceptualisation. It functions to 'establish [a] fixed and distinguished "'here'" within the undifferentiated linear continuum' (Rotman 59). This point consequently 'marks a "'this'" with respect to which all positions on the line can be orientated' (59). The notion of the 'continuum' is a 'core mathematical concept and the bedrock on which science [...] has constructed its measurement based engagement with the physical world' (71), and thus is the form of rationalised space activated and imposed by the subject of science as its means of comprehension. Crucially, this 'linear continuum' ultimately 'embraces infinity' (71), insofar as this continuum is potential, Cartesian, indefinite space.

Again, much like the previous consideration of Stevie's circles disrupting the notion of the centre, were this the only moment in the text where one could identify the functioning of symbolic reality according to Cartesian or Newtonian infinite space and a measurable axis then it could easily be dismissed. However, Conrad depicts numerous pockets of socio-symbolic reality that appear to operate according to this system. Following Verloc's return home as the anarchist contemplates how to best execute the bombing intrigue, Conrad depicts social reality with an intensive focus on the potential infinitude of space and physicality of matter. This potentially infinite model of space is also ironically treated by Conrad. Verloc initially gazes through 'a cold window-pane – a fragile film of glass stretche[s] between him and the enormity of cold, black, wet, muddy, inhospitable accumulation of bricks, slates and stones' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 49). This density of material then segues into a Cartesian spatial configuration. Firstly, 'in the quiet, narrow street, measured footsteps approach [...] the house' as if the person walking is trying to 'pace out all eternity, from gas-lamp to gas-lamp in a night without end'. Simultaneously, the 'drowsy ticking of the old clock on the landing bec[omes] distinctly audible' (50). This 'measured', linear depiction of motion and time traversed, gauged by each 'gas-light' passed and the 'ticking' of the clock, implies a

computation of an infinite space, suggested by the reference to 'pace out all eternity'. Each 'gas-lamp' almost functions as a spatial marker on the coordinate axes of the 'mathematical continuum [which] consists of all possible points on a line' (Rotman 71).

In broader Cartesian geometrical terms, one must 'acknowledge therefore that the real world is infinite, or rather [...] *indefinite* [italics in original]', and therefore 'we cannot limit Euclidean space [-] the entirety of the corporeal substance, has no limits in its extension' (Koyré, *Closed World* 104). Fully available for measurement, this space is ostensibly indefinite in scope. Again, when Winnie and Verloc retire to bed just prior to Verloc's trip to the continent, Conrad notes that Winnie 'let the lonely clock on the landing count off fifteen ticks into the abyss of eternity' (*Secret Agent* 133) reinforcing this idea of an infinite continuum that can be measured and mapped. Suggestively, these two constructions of space appear to be ironically dissected by Conrad. Both lead nowhere and the spaces are characterised by a sterile, nihilistic quality. The first is simply shrouded in darkness in a 'night without end', while in the second the clock is described as 'lonely' and ticking into the void-like vacuum of an 'abyss'. This spatial infinitude offers no comfort or escape for the characters. In fact, it only seems to redouble and intensify the inexorable constriction of their rationally constituted existence.

The term 'infinite' is commonly equivalent with the notion of the 'abyss', as Descartes himself specifies when he references God's plans as 'equally hidden in the inscrutable abyss of his wisdom' (qtd. in Cottingham 302). It is important to note then not only the general etymological implication of abyss as a synonym of infinite—stemming from the Greek '*abussos*' meaning 'without bottom'—but, further, that Cartesian physics consciously and precisely employs it in this context. It appears highly conceivable, in light of the novel's engagement with rationalism, that the recurrent references to the 'abyss' could be interpreted as an infinite, yet measurable, space rather than a disruption of rational space. This idea of the 'abyss' as a disruption of objective time and space is asserted by Sue Tyley,

who argues that the ‘abyss of eternity corresponds to the temporal reality that emerges when the objective registering of time has been disproved by subjective experience’ (32). An alternative view is that this very ‘abyss of eternity’ confirms what Tyley tries to dismiss. The ‘objective registering of time’ is in fact coextensive with the subject of science’s existence in socio-symbolic reality as the infinitude of the ‘abyss’ is the Cartesian continuum of measurable space.

The symbolic order of *The Secret Agent* appears to be constituted by Cartesian rationalism – mathematically inflected, fully susceptible to analytical engagement and potentially infinite. This symbolic reality, however, is in turn subordinated to the dominant ideology of capitalism; emanating from the centre of imperial power itself, Parliament – the political heart of the empire. This is discernible during the carriage ride of Winnie, Stevie and their mother. As they journey to their mother’s new home, ‘in the wider spaces of Whitehall, all visual evidences of motion bec[ome] imperceptible. The rattle and jingle of the glass [goes] on indefinitely in front of the long Treasury building – and time itself seem[s] to stand still’ (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 117). On one level, time appears to be experienced only in regards to motion. This is a concept earlier displayed when Sir Ethelred’s clock is seen ‘mov[ing] through the space of seven minutes’ (103), so that the linear movement of time is enacted via spatial reference. Interestingly, the association of a linear, fixed movement of time and space is one that Lacan attempts to disrupt through his usage of the variable-length session. Rather than the fixed-length consultation—typically the Freudian hour—Lacan famously introduces the method of ‘scansion’ (*Écrits* 209) where he might stop a session unexpectedly in order to undermine the conscious ego of the subject, and to ‘offer the analyst genuine hints of the unconscious’ (Johnston, *Time Driven* 24) – psychic material not dictated by the patient gazing at the face of the clock and trying to “fill” time with empty speech. However, there is a further implication encoded within this form of motion at this point in the novel.

This momentarily ‘indefinite’—or perhaps infinite—movement of the carriage

appears in conjunction with an eclipse of temporality within the specificity of 'Whitehall'. This seems to suggest an elongation or expansion of the abstract, socio-symbolic reality of the subject, much like Sir Ethelred's 'expanding' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 102) personage, because of its closeness to the central point of empire. Conrad states that time itself 'seem[s] to stand still' in these 'wider spaces' of Parliament. Lacan's conscious subject of the ego is not autonomous. It is structurally fixed outside of itself in symbolic reality. Due to proximity to the centre of imperialism, its zero point, the symbolic's ideological vectors are intensified to the degree where this potential infinitude of space, this 'abyss of eternity', is momentarily glimpsed within the narrative and consequently affects the psychic space of the subjects in its field. This effect is evidenced in their perception that 'time seem[s] to stand still'. A question may remain as to why the very 'walls of St. Stephen's, with its towers and pinnacles, contemplate [...] in immobility and silence a cab that jingle[s]' (117) – surely a commonplace, typical event on the London streets.

What is it that occurs at this moment that the very physical apex of the ideology of imperialist capitalism 'contemplates'? It is simply the cabman's whipping of the horse which Stevie attempts to disrupt—'You mustn't [...] It hurts' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 117)—a superficially meaningless moment that actually interrogates the very mechanism internal to the capitalist undertaking. This mechanism is the quotidian exploitation of labour – a normal occurrence performed throughout the empire and an action which enables the capitalist social edifice to function. That Conrad especially foregrounds the Treasury, from where both capitalist power and financial policy is exercised, to 'contemplate' the infliction of pain to sustain a commercial enterprise—the cabman's business—colours the act with a particularly ideological dimension. Stevie's decision to 'suddenly [...] get down from the box' results in 'shouts on the pavement', where 'people r[un] forward' amid 'whispering curses of indignation and astonishment' (118). This reaction reinforces his misalignment to the functioning of the dominant geometry underpinning the capitalist symbolic. Just as much as

he disrupts the company where his father's friend places him through his misuse of fireworks, so here too he similarly dislocates a commercial operation. This disruptive act is worthy of 'contemplation' by the physical representation of capitalist ideology, Parliament and the Treasury.

### **The closing of the symbolic 'suture'**

Of course, the 'expanding' corporealism of Sir Ethelred is based here too, and it is from this very location that the Assistant Commissioner departs later in the narrative to continue the symbolic suturing of the event. As he journeys through London to Verloc's shop, his preparatory movements leading up to his decisive meeting with the professed anarchist maintain the Lacanian interpretation of symbolic space as fully susceptible to a scientific, analytical impetus and exhibiting a Cartesian-Newtonian uniformity. Conrad depicts the detective's journey in terms of a descent into a viscous, slippery metropolis, 'like the descent into a slimy aquarium from which the water had been run off' (*Secret Agent* 110). Here, as Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan argues, the image of the aquarium functions as 'replica of an ocean, a false representation of unbounded space within a square box of glass' ("Sudden Holes" 214), suggesting, of course, the inverse – a bounded space that is wholly open to visual and analytical scrutiny. The evocation of a Cartesian uniformity of matter is discernible in his brief visit to the Italian restaurant. During his visit he sees a variety of cuisines with 'all their national and private characteristics' removed, and even the subjectivity of the staff is reduced to a uniform appearance as 'neither [is] their personality stamped in any way, professionally, socially, or racially' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 111). Similar to the earlier policeman who seems to be composed of the same homogenous matter as a lamp-post, Conrad situates the senior officer's walk near a 'van and horses' (113)—the inorganic and organic—which suddenly appear to 'merge into one mass' (113). Even the first glimpse of

Verloc's shop is dense with geometrical resonances, as it is 'heaving' with 'boxes and the shapes of books' (113).

The Assistant Commissioner's interview with Verloc, conducted in a local hotel, sees the officer elicit the necessary information from the double agent to enable him to return to Sir Ethelred. During this interview, Chief Inspector Heat's dialogue with Winnie also enacts the closure of the affair using the piece of cloth from Stevie's coat. As Winnie recognizes the fabric and writing, Heat becomes cognisant of the full dimensions of the bombing, as he states, 'identification's perfect. And in that moment he ha[s] a glimpse into the whole amazing truth' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 150). While the use of 'into' appropriately implies a spatial means of symbolic encompassment towards a presupposed interior, it is the Assistant Commissioner's final interview with Sir Ethelred that ultimately seals the suturing of the blast. The interview presents a full and final integration of the event within the highest echelons of the symbolic order. It takes place back in Parliament, the 'House, *par excellence*, in the minds of many millions of men' (155) – a reference through which Conrad illuminates the structural position this apex of ideological power occupies in the subject's consciousness. As the officer enters, Conrad sketches a suitably geometrical detail on the minister's table – that among the 'oblong sheets of paper' there is 'nothing else on the large flat surface except a little bronze statue draped in a toga, mysteriously watchful in its shadowy immobility' (157). Conrad depicts the statue in a similarly 'watchful' state of 'immobility' as the very building of Parliament that earlier 'contemplate[s...] in immobility' (117) Stevie's and Winnie's cab ride. This brief vignette encodes a spatial model of a Renaissance classicism of form—defined and demarcated—which again suggests a symbolic system of imperialism that wholly surveys and maps its domain.

Here, within this apogee of secure, rationalised symbolic space, the Assistant Commissioner can finally enclose and suture the rupture of the blast. This suturing is exemplified when he recounts to Sir Ethelred his definitive statement to Verloc, that 'I know



you are at the bottom of this affair' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 158). Here, the spatialised, topological conceptualisation of the blast is completed, and its outer geometrical limits are finally circumscribed into the dominant rationalism of the symbolic order. The handshake of the 'expanded, enormous and weighty' (160) minister concludes the orchestrations of the ideological resources activated by the dominant political order. Yet the Assistant Commissioner's subsequent meeting with Vladimir sees the officer utilise the symbolised affair as a point of departure for the further benefit of the ruling ideology. He refers to the now fully sutured event in terms of appreciation to the Russian diplomat. He states '[w]hat please[s him] the most in this affair [...] is that it makes such an excellent starting point for a piece of work' (163) which is the removal of political subversives from the country. The integrated 'affair' now becomes the zero point for another ideological operation of maintaining the ruling elite's position.

It appears fitting that the closure of the affair inside the ideological bounds of the symbolic order is enacted within the milieu of the Explorer's Club, the 'building of noble proportions and hospitable aspect, with the light of a great hall falling through its glass doors on a broad flight of stairs' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 165). Here, within Conrad's delineation of the building, is an exemplification of spatial composition, precision of plane and form very similar to the secure surfaces, motions and subjective structures comprising the Hyde Park sequence. Indeed, both light and line are emphasised in an almost celebratory fashion, with the building's 'noble proportions' and 'hospitable aspect' suggesting a fusion between morality and geometry. It is as if certain systems of ethics are co-extensive with specific geometrical forms in a Cartesian and Newtonian space that appears comprehensively visible, as the 'light of a great hall fall[s] through its glass doors'. Most tellingly, this eulogy is ultimately directed towards the production and sustaining of a distinctly colonial symbolic system, given its identity as the Explorer's Club. The elite club validates the expansion of an imperial model of space – deemed ethical by this approbatory depiction – that is fully

analysable and subordinated to the project of empire; a vehicle for the celebration of an imposition of a capitalist spatial paradigm that processes the previously blank spaces of maps into colonially integrated, mapped space subject to the needs of empire.

### **Winnie and the ideological geometry of the subject**

While the Assistant Commissioner congratulates himself, Winnie's discovery of the death of her brother initiates the sequence which sees her murder her husband, attempt to flee and ultimately commit suicide in the final movements of the novel. As Winnie flees the house, Conrad depicts the structuration of Winnie's "subjective" space and her topological conceptualisation of the murder in a markedly similar spatial framework to that of the Assistant Commissioner's. Even though Winnie 'refrain[s] from looking deep into things, [she is] compelled to look into the very bottom of this thing' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 191). Immediately, one can discern the same spatial, conceptual circumscription of the subject of science embedded here. In this psychic process she is 'compelled'—almost by a predetermined process of her conscious mind—to visualise the outer circumference of the murder. The aspect that is truly "compelling", however, is what Conrad locates as signaling this circumference. At this limit, she 's[ees] there an object. That object [is] the gallows' (191).

Here is the same abstract spatialisation of consciousness articulated in terms commensurate with Cartesian rationalism. What is most significant is that this geometrical structure is subordinated to the functioning of the dominant ideology. Within this circumference is a delimitation of the very possibility of what the subject can even think or conceptualise. This is illustrated in the inexorable movement of ideological logic apparent in this psychic sequence of Winnie's thinking, a logic which fatally determines that at the 'very

bottom' of these events is the 'gallows'. Not only is there a distinct physicality in the thinking, it is further demarcated by spatial coordinates that conclude with a tangible material object that embodies the legal process of the dominant ideology. These are the latent 'ideological resources' of the dominant symbolic that appear intrinsic to the fundamental structure of the subject itself. Upon activation, the psychic space of Winnie appears to accord with and enact a rationalised form of space that is the same as the socio-symbolic space of the Hyde Park sequence and the Assistant Commissioner's suturing of the affair. This is the form of space that is rationally governed and directed at maintaining the dominant symbolic order. In Winnie's case it is directed at punishing her transgression. This mathematically inflected determination is keenly evident in her repeated imaginings of subsequent symbolic control. She is to be placed 'within four high walls' and hanged, with the 'drop given' being 'fourteen feet' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 191) – a precise, quantifiable distance.

Subjective space appears then to be organised and circumscribed via an ideologically determined rationalism that also constitutes socio-symbolic reality. The imperative that situates the gallows as the logical conclusion of her actions further delimits and orientates the actual experiential space of Winnie as she tries to escape the possibility of execution. While symbolic reality is external to the subject on one level, it is evidently integral to the subject's own interior, psychic space. Žižek states, this 'imaginary self-experience is the way for the subject to misrecognise [her] radical dependence on the big Other, on the symbolic order as [her] decentred cause' (*Sublime* 116). This structure is apparent when Winnie contemplates suicide as the only initial alternative, so that the 'street frighten[s] her, since it le[ads] either to the gallows or to the river' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 192). Here again is an ideologically inflected rationalism at work – the experiential, interior space of Winnie is reconfigured according to the dominant imperatives governing the external symbolic order, so that the potential space available to her consciousness is bounded according to its laws. She can either go to her death in the 'gallows' or suicide in the 'river'. While she finally

realises escape abroad is possible and even briefly available when she happens upon Ossipon, it is highly suggestive that this ideologically influenced, mathematically determined rationalism is the first, immediately examinable subjective process delineated by Conrad directly following the murder.

There is a 'mathematical thinking' (13) that Rotman proposes in his conceptualisation of the subject that may tentatively be applied to the workings of Winnie's subjectivity in this episode. This structure which Rotman outlines enables one to 'distinguish between sorts of mathematical agency' (13) at work in his model of the subject. Accordingly, it can be used to elucidate the psychical mechanics of the self-conscious subject of science present in Conrad's text. Two aspects of Rotman's model are most relevant here. The first being the structure of what he designates the 'Subject', which Rotman asserts is a 'conscious – intentional, imagining – subject' (14). This should, therefore, be aligned at its most basic level to the *cogito qua* Lacan's subject of science – unitary and self-aware. What is especially provocative is that Rotman then deploys a secondary level to the mechanics of this 'Subject'. This level is a secondary structure conceived to enact certain mathematical operations according to specific mathematical laws. Rotman designates this structure the 'Agent', which is a 'skeleton diagram of the Subject' (13). This 'Agent' is a 'fictional self' which operates within 'fictional worlds' (13) that Rotman's 'Subject' creates; but what is acutely suggestive is that this Agent is not 'reflective and has no intentions' (14). It is 'simply required to behave according to a prior pattern [...] imagined for him by the subject' (14). This subjective structure therefore implies the imaginative 'agent' as only existing within predetermined patterns that are constituted within the self-conscious subject, or, *cogito*. Are not Winnie's conceptualisations of her hanging, of the 'drop given [being] fourteen feet' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 191), not enactments of an imagined 'Agent' operating within certain 'prior patterns' inscribed by the ruling ideology of the socio-symbolic order? If so, then the fecundity of what Rotman terms an 'Agent' for Conrad's novel is considerable. The very notion of agency appears as that of

limited subjective agency, constituted within an ideologically inflected geometry that predetermines and delimits the very possibilities and outcomes of self-conscious thought. The real secret of Conrad's agent, therefore, is the limited agency of the subject itself. A fundamental limitation that Verloc's subjective position works to maintain.

### **The roles of Verloc and Stevie: agent of abstract rationalism and sublime object of ideology**

Of course, as many critics have noted, the abundance of abstract, geometrical shapes and lines often seems to coalesce around the form of the eponymous secret agent. The most resonant of these, inarguably, is that of the triangle – a shape which is 'the delta of Verloc's code designation which becomes the sign of enclosure and secrecy' (Carabine 18) in the novel. However, this assertion can actually be extended, as the triangle is discernible at multiple junctures within the symbolic order delineated within the text. Despite Vladimir's comedic shock at first meeting Verloc in the embassy, there exists a deeper implication in this choice of shape which accords with the latent tectonics of the novel. This implication reinforces and develops the earlier depiction of Verloc's relationship to the space of the bourgeois subject exemplified in the Hyde Park scene. Stallman first notes the appearance of the triangle via its various manifestations, as the 'triangle which identifies the anonymous Secret Agent Verloc—signifying both anonymity and insularity—links with the triangle of Brett Street where Verloc lives insulated from sunlight and from life itself' (119). It is arguable that Stallman's observation perhaps limits the broader, more fundamental, aspects of Verloc's relationship to 'life' in the text but his connection is resonant.

The shape of the triangle, Verloc's special appellation, is in itself a representation of rationalised, abstract space – a secure form coordinated by Cartesian logic. This abstract spatial structure orbits around his very person. The 'skirts of his heavy overcoat' are seen 'hanging in a triangle on each side of the chair' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 134), and this shape is

further embedded and articulated into the actual concrete frame of social reality in Brett Street, his home, as an 'open triangular space surrounded by dark and mysterious houses' (112). It implies that his subjective space and identity, composed through this rationalism, not only correspond to the symbolic reality of imperial London – but are in some sense coextensive with and supportive of it in a way similar to the bourgeois subjects' co-extensiveness to the space of the park. Verloc is an agent—not only for Vladimir—but also for a particular ideologically charged, rationalised construct of reality that constitutes the symbolic space of the novel. Thus Verloc helps sustain a certain form of rationalised reality subordinated to the dominant mode of capitalism. Even a triangle in the shape of fabric with Stevie's address on enables Heat to begin the process of suturing the affair. The abstract form of the triangle, and thus Verloc's subjectivity, helps facilitate the functioning of the ruling ideology of the socio-symbolic order of *The Secret Agent*.

Yet while Verloc functions as an agent for the dominance and coherence of symbolic reality in the text, it is to the disintegrated remains of Stevie that one must turn in order to locate the effects of the Lacanian real in the form of Žižek's concept of the sublime object. Žižek situates his discussion of what constitutes a sublime object within the Kantian-Hegelian debate of sublimity but offers a uniquely Lacanian perspective. He starts from the commonly held notion that the sublime object is 'the paradox of an object which, in the very field of representation, provides a view, in a negative way, of the dimension of what is unrepresentable' (*Sublime* 230). For Žižek, the sublime still 'excites and agitates' (228) but he criticizes Kant's model on the grounds that we 'determine the Thing as a transcendent surplus beyond what can be represented' (232). In other words, beyond phenomenal reality, the idea or 'Thing-in-itself' exists.

Therefore, Žižek rejects Kant's sublime by way of Hegel's criticism of it in terms of the bounds of representation. The Hegelian criticism asserts that Kant's notion still 'remains a prisoner of the field of representation' (232) as when we identify the 'Thing' as this

‘transcendent surplus’ beyond what is representable, we still ‘determine it on the basis of the field of representation’ (232). By contrast, Hegel’s position, adopted by Žižek, suggests that ‘there is *nothing* beyond phenomenality, beyond the field of representation’ (232). Were it feasible to align this nothingness with the Lacanian real, which, by definition, resists symbolisation in any phenomenally discernible form, then the sublime object’s structure can be located in *The Secret Agent* around the explosion and the death of Stevie – the novel’s undepicted, absent centre. For Žižek, we ‘overcome phenomenality not by reaching beyond it, but by the experience of how there is nothing beyond it’ (233) which, in this case, is the ‘nothing’ of the real, which remains structurally anterior and apart from socio-symbolic reality.

Accordingly, the function of the sublime object is as ‘an object which occupies the place, replaces, fills out the empty place of the Thing as the void, as the pure nothing of absolute negativity – the sublime is an object whose positive body is just an embodiment of Nothing’ (Žižek, *Sublime* 234) – though it must be acknowledged that the concept of negation for Hegel is only one moment in the movement of the *Aufhebung* and the history of spirit. The fragments of Stevie’s body observed by Heat are suggestive of this very object; an object which embodies or ‘fills out’ the void of the Lacanian real locatable in the text as the absence of the explosion – its central, unmediated event. The anxiety felt by Heat as he experiences a ‘horrible notion that ages of atrocious pain and mental torture could be contained between two successive winks of an eye’ (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 71) appears suggestive of his proximity to the real at that moment. As analysed earlier, this anxiety is generated when the subject has a ‘glimpse of the lack in the Other’ which is likened to a ‘void’ (Glynos 71). In Žižek’s analysis of the wreck of the Titanic as sublime object—the loss of the ship is also noted at the time by Conrad for its ‘magnitude, suddenness and severity’ (*Notes* 213)—further parallels can be drawn to the corporeal remains of Stevie. Thus, the fragments of Stevie become a ‘Thing in the Lacanian sense: the material leftover[.] By looking at the [object] we gain an

insight into the forbidden domain, into a space that should be left unseen' (Žižek, *Sublime* 76). It is a glimpse into this 'forbidden domain' that generates such anxiety in Heat.

The formal qualities of the sublime object also accord with the appearance of Stevie's remains. For Žižek, the sublime is not the Kantian sublime of some 'boundless, terrifying' depiction of 'raging nature' (*Sublime* 234) in the image of a storm-tossed ocean or mountainous peak. Rather, it is identifiable as the 'little piece of the Real' (234), where this nothingness or 'negativity, to attain its "'being-for-itself'", must embody itself again in some miserable, radically contingent corporeal leftover' (234). Conrad's description of the bloody detritus of Stevie's eviscerated body and clothing—'a heap of nameless fragments' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 71)—appears wholly commensurate with this definition of a 'corporeal leftover', which embodies the negativity of Lacan's real threatening the coherence of socio-symbolic reality. The resonant term here is 'again' – the nothingness is first discernible via its absence in the explosion. However, it then has to 'embody itself again' in the 'corporeal leftover' of a fragment of Stevie's remains to be perceptible within the symbolic order.

For the object to be a sublime object it 'cannot be approached too closely: if we get too near to it, it loses its sublime features and becomes an ordinary vulgar object – it can persist only in an interspace, an intermediate state, viewed from a certain perspective, half-seen' (Žižek, *Sublime* 192). Heat himself finds it difficult to look closely at the remains, only 'stooping guardedly' (Conrad, *Secret Agent* 71) over the table, while the constable can only muster a 'sidelong glance' (70) and later an 'oblique glance' (71), reflective of Žižek's 'certain perspective, half-seen'. In particular, the fragment of Stevie's coat seems highly pertinent. Even though Heat takes the scrap of clothing away from the Assistant Commissioner, the superior official—later in discussion with Sir Ethelred over the affair—still refers to it as an 'extraordinary' and 'incredible' object' (106) though he only see it for a moment.

**Conclusion: Conrad's latent irony of rationalism**



What I hope to have demonstrated in this section of my thesis is that a more profound, subterranean irony is at work in *The Secret Agent* than one which can be restricted primarily to Conrad's treatment of character. This irony is one which disturbs and dislocates, via inherent fissures and aporias, the intellectual foundations that guarantee the functioning of a rationalised model of social reality and the aforementioned concreteness of epistemological certainty upon which the characters are grounded. It is an irony which is discernible through its own internal absences.

That *The Secret Agent* is a novel obsessed with the discourse of rationalism in its myriad forms—mathematics, gridding, mapping, coordinates and physics—appears inarguable. However, this raises a subsidiary question as to how we read this fixation. Can it be seen as Conrad subscribing to this rationalistic view himself; an unironic perspective that suggests it is the dominant discourse structuring reality? Or perhaps as an unstable use of irony in the text – a use that overflows beyond character into other structural facets of the work? This latter suggestion can be refuted through its specificity and precision of use and target. I would suggest that the irony can be read, instead, as a deliberate, sustained parodic critique of the discourse of rationalism. A critique intricately designed to reveal rationalism's inherent gaps and aporias which are ineradicably present in such a system, despite that system's vigorous attempts to erase and repress them.

Conrad exposes and rejects the possibility that the discourse of rationalism can offer a comprehensive expression of the subject or social reality. While he clearly recognises the influence and centrality of a rationalism subordinated to capitalism, the author fundamentally rejects it as a flawed and limited means of conceptualising the subject and apprehending the world. It is no accident that rationalism finds its fullest exploration and critique in what is perhaps Conrad's bleakest and most pessimistic novel. After such a detailed and sustained investigation of rationalism's role in the structuring of the subject's

consciousness, Conrad's gaze then changes to consider the position of the subject in the wider social matrix. It is as if, after the excruciatingly precise exploration of the elements that compose the interior of the subject's conscious self, Conrad then broadens his focus to consider where each individual subject might be located within the wider constellation of various and conflicting ideological systems – an exploration that becomes the central point of his last great work, *Under Western Eyes*.



## ***Under Western Eyes* and Lacan's Four Discourses**

### **Critical position of *Under Western Eyes***

Whilst deemed a 'distinguished work' (220), *Under Western Eyes*, initially at least, was not counted among the 'unquestionable classics of the first order' (220) by Conrad's first great critic, F.R. Leavis. Despite this view, however, he acknowledges that it 'must be counted among those [works] upon which Conrad's status as one of the great English masters securely rests' (220-21), recognising within it a masterful exploration of the theme of 'moral isolation' (221) among its many strengths. Juxtaposed to Leavis and upping the critical ante, Albert J. Guerard, writing in 1958, instead asserts that *Under Western Eyes* is 'the greater novel' (221) out of Conrad's 'major phase' in direct comparison to *The Secret Agent*, seeing it as an example of the writer's 'fine satirical intelligence', and, most pertinently, its 'enormous personal achievement is to have done so much justice to Russia and things Russian' (221). This latter observation is indicative of what has been perhaps the more dominant perspective of the text – that it is a highly personal, intimate novel imbued with echoes of the familial strife Conrad endured as consequences of his father's involvement with Polish nationalism-

Criticism of *Under Western Eyes* has therefore often defined it as an engagement with and critique of Russia and the Russian psyche. It has been lauded as a pioneering attempt to sketch out a boundary between West and East, to the extent that 'Conrad [is] surely the first fiction-writer in Europe to show so clearly and with such assurance the complete separateness and strangeness of the Russian East – to draw so firm a line of demarcation between Russian psychology and Western' (Tarnawski 5). Consequently, one strain of critical discourse has declared that there is 'no question that *Under Western Eyes* is fundamentally concerned with the Russian in particular, with Russian politics and history, the

Russian psychology, the relationship of the Russian to the Western' (Gilliam 218). While these particular views can certainly be endorsed by a reading of the novel, they by no means exhaust discussion of what has become a much richer critical debate – well beyond the scope of a reductive East and West dichotomy. Indeed, any reader who deems *Under Western Eyes* as simply 'an anti-Russian polemic has not learned to respond to the full range of Conrad's wide ranging irony and scepticism, nor to the depths of his insight into the human mind' (Tanner 199).

This wider critical purview has led to H.S. Gilliam suggesting that 'the particular concern with Russia and its relationship to the West, while retaining its specificity, is transmuted into a more universal theme: the Russian and the Western become symbols of states of consciousness' (Gilliam 218). The interpretation of the novel outside of a geographical dichotomy and into the field of subjectivity is developed by Allan Hepburn, who sees in the text a 'complicated layering of narrative between Razumov's testimony and the Professor's retelling of the story [which] works towards the fulfilment of the principle that every character is ideologically culpable' (283). Rather than a text replete with a narrator that offers a distanced commentary based on a bifurcation between Russia and the West, instead every character is inherently involved with a 'complicity' in the 'networks of power' (282) in the novel. As such, Hepburn argues that *Under Western Eyes* has a dynamic that 'nudges us into reading the novel as an ideological site where the complexities and conflicts of power are staged' (288). It is at this juncture, where both concerns of ideology and subjectivity become apparent, that it is perhaps most fitting to deploy a highly specific aspect of the Lacanian model of subjectivity and its explication of power – Lacan's structure of the four discourses.

It seems appropriate to read what is now regarded as 'Conrad's most daring experiment in narration and understanding' (Wheatley 206)—perhaps his most technically and conceptually complex novel—through the prismatic structure of the most uniquely

Lacanian analytical matrix available. This appropriateness is due to the potential of this highly intricate text being comprehended according to one of the discourses' four structural positions. Indeed, the novel's potential for a Lacanian analysis has been signalled by Josiane Paccaud and Catherine Rising. Paccaud observes that *Under Western Eyes* offers a 'deep, intuitive understanding of [...] unconscious structures' ("Name Father" 204) in regards to the function of the Name of the Father, whereas Rising is the first critic to recognise the text's resonance for Lacan's four discourses. Rising's work only offers a cursory discussion of the novel's affinity with Lacan's model—it is equally concerned with Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* as well as events in Conrad's life—and does not offer the sustained and systematic reading of *Under Western Eyes* that this chapter offers. However, it nonetheless helpfully opens up the possibility of considering the text's 'relation to Lacan's major discourses' (Rising 24), as well as indicating where some of these structures might be located in the novel.

For Lacan, discourse itself is a 'necessary structure' (*Other Side* 12) that not only 'conditions every speech act' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 32) but also 'goes well beyond speech' to help establish our 'conduct [and] acts' (Lacan, *Other Side* 12). It is therefore intrinsic in every subject. Helping to constitute Lacan's conception of discourse is the function of master signifiers. These are signifiers that have the 'potential function to represent the subject' (Lacan, *Other Side* 89), and are thus 'identity-bearing words' (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 23) that substantiate and organise a subject's ego.

Lacan's four discourses is a model that enables multiple forms of discourse—such as speech, thought and action—to be understood and explained through reference to one of the four positions that make up its structure. Precisely, the model 'identifies four possible types of social bond, four possible articulations of the symbolic network which regulates intersubjective relations' (Evans 45). These four possible positions govern all subjective standpoints and are designated, in Lacan's 'four formulas' (*Other Side* 31), as the discourses

of the University, the Master, the Hysteric, and the Analyst. Thus every subject can be identified as being constituted within one of these discourses at any given time and, on a broader level, this model offers 'the means, respectively, of understanding four key social phenomena': firstly, 'educating' in the discourse of the University, 'governing' in the discourse of the Master, 'desiring and protesting' through the discourse of the Hysteric, and 'transforming and revolutionizing' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 32) in the discourse of the Analyst. This model is not intended to 'dissolve' the subject down to a reductive subject of discourse, in the sense that the 'subject conceived by structuralism [or poststructuralism] is an "effect" of discourse [-] an illusion produced by linguistic effects' (Alcorn 26) as it might be in the case in Foucault's model. As discussed in my previous section, Lacan's subject is not an epiphenomenon generated by a symbolic structure, rather it is the case that the 'subject operates upon discourse, and discourse operates the subject' in a form of 'dialogical interaction' (27). This interaction rejects the notion of, for example, the docility of Foucault's subject which could be 'determined because it is enmeshed in relationships of power and is produced as an effect through disciplines and practices' (McLaren 56). Instead, the Lacanian subject harbours the capacity of 'resistance', which 'questions this passivity and calls attention to the subject's unique ability to deny, dismiss, or deform social directives' (Alcorn 29). Indeed, it is the very function of the Analyst's discourse to enable the individual to reorientate their subjective coordinates and gain some measure of agency.

Therefore, the model of the four discourses enables not only an interpretation of Conrad's figuration of Razumov's subjectivity from its establishment in and transition through various socio-symbolic positions, but further his inter-relationship to other characters and the very nature of the socio-symbolic institutions that help constitute and orientate his subjectivity. The four discourse positions encompass 'intrasubjective or psychological relations'—the interiority of the subject—but also all 'intersubjective or social relations, and relations with the non-human world' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 32), as Lacan identifies the

‘reality of a discourse that is already in the world and that underpins it’ (*Other Side* 14). These structures can elucidate a comprehensive co-extensiveness between subject, ideology and the Other of the socio-symbolic order. Ultimately, Lacan’s theory of the four discourses is not a subjective model intermittently relevant, or sporadically applicable, to a subject’s actions and interactions. It is rather a fundamental, inextricable structure inherent in every utterance, movement and articulation on both an intrasubjective and intersubjective plane. As Lacan asserts, ‘all determination of the subject, and therefore of thought, depends on discourse’ (*Other Side* 152), which includes ‘meaning’, and ‘even one’s identity and sense of being’ (Bracher, “Lacan’s Theory” 33).

Such is the resonance of Lacan’s matrix that it has been developed into a broader analytical paradigm by a number of secondary writers. While I will draw on Lacan’s own work in this chapter, I have found it particularly useful to integrate the work of Mark Bracher – who is perhaps the foremost explicator of Lacan’s theory of the four discourses. In this chapter of my thesis, the four discourses will be used as a privileged interpretative matrix applied to *Under Western Eyes* in order to comprehend and locate Razumov’s subjective development in terms of each of the four possible structural positions he could either be located within or contrasted against: education, governance, revolt and transformation. Further, it will also be used as the means of elucidating the complex inter-relationship between Razumov, General T-----, Prince K-----, Peter Ivanovitch, the Haldins and the narrator, among others. It will trace the genesis of Razumov’s subjectivity from the establishing strictures of the University discourse to the transformative and potentially liberating Analyst’s discourse, considering how ‘a change in discourse can produce changes in these psychological and social realities’ (Bracher, “Lacan’s Theory” 33) that determine the subject in the first place.

### **The formation of Razumov: discourse of the University**



*Under Western Eyes* sees Razumov, a diligent and solitary student at the University of St. Petersburg and illegitimate son of the aristocratic Prince K---, unwittingly and unwillingly implicated in the political assassination of a leading Tsarist government figure committed by a radical student colleague, Victor Haldin. Forced to decide his political allegiance in order to secure his future, he betrays Haldin to the authorities and is subsequently recruited to spy on Haldin's revolutionary circle in Geneva. It is in Geneva where he is faced with Haldin's sister and the psychological consequences of his betrayal.

In a both physical and subjective sense, Razmuov's subjectivity initially appears as being situated in what Lacan designates the discourse of the University, the discourse defined by the assimilation of organised, systematic knowledge. This foundational discourse enacts a series of formational, educational experiences which 'addresses the remainder of the real' in the child, specifically in 'the 'case of pedagogical knowledge, the "'raw, uncultivated child"' [...] turning it into the subject' (Žižek, "Four Discourses" 78). Therefore, it is a formative discourse that structures and directs the conscious thought of the nascent subject according to, as will become apparent, the ideological imperatives of the ruling elite, which in Razumov's case is Russian Tsarism. It is highly appropriate then that Conrad's initial presentation of Razumov situates him clearly as a youth keenly engaged with his studies in a formal, academic context. He is described as a 'young man' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 4) studying at the prestigious 'St. Petersburg University' (5) undertaking a structured, official academic degree as a 'third year's student of philosophy' (5).

Of course, Razumov's position within this discourse is not limited to his physical situation in the socio-symbolic order as a student—his lodgings, work in the library or lecture theatre—but the extent to which his egoic thinking is shown to be subordinated to the intellectual requirements of the institution. Accordingly, in the University discourse, subjects 'begin [their] academic careers as students, in the position of *a* [*qua* untrained, uncultivated youth], receivers of the system of knowledge [and are] subjected in this position to a

dominating totalized system of knowledge/belief' (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 55). It is tempting to suggest that Razumov accords with this position as Conrad immediately depicts him as someone that 'attend[s] the obligatory lectures regularly' (*Western Eyes* 5)—thus reflecting a focused, diligent work ethic—but who, more importantly, is 'considered by the authorities as a very promising student' (5). The reference to 'promising', assigned by senior institutional figures, implies the extent to which Razumov appears to successfully assimilate the 'dominating totalized system of knowledge' which in this case is his study of philosophy. As Lacan notes, the subjects of this initial discourse 'have only one thing to do, which is to weave [them]selves into [this system] along with [...] those who teach [,] under the banner of the means of production' (*Other Side* 203-04) of knowledge. Razumov readily accedes to this imperative, as he 'work[s] at home in the manner of a man who means to get on' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 5), attending lectures and a 'professor's informal reception' (5).

Indeed, Conrad's reiteration of Razumov's dedication to his study, that his 'main concern [is] with his work, his studies, and with his own future' (8), reflects the extent to which he is invested in this discourse. It is necessary here to briefly refer to the Lacanian framework of 'master signifiers' and how they help constitute the identity of the subject's ego, in this case Razumov's conscious identity as a student. Master signifiers 'are any signifiers that a subject has invested his or her identity in— [they] are simply accepted as having a value or validity that goes without saying' (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 24-25). As such, they hold a powerful value in determining a subject's self-conception because of 'the role they play in structuring the subject-specifically in giving the subject a sense of identity and direction' (25). So for Razumov, it is feasible to suggest, given his commitment to his academic studies, that the master signifiers he identifies with would be signifiers such as "student", "university" and "academia" to name a few – all signifiers that are reinforced and supported by the discourse of the University.

It further clarifies and amplifies the effects of the University discourse that Conrad

presents Razumov lacking any family or friends beyond an 'obscure attorney, who seems to act as his guardian in some measure' (*Western Eyes* 5) – he has no other influences or personages to shape his subjectivity. Conrad situates him 'without a family' and reveals that 'no home influences had shaped his opinions or his feelings' (8). At this juncture in the novel, Razumov functions as an exemplification of the discourse of the University, as he is primarily dependent upon it for his socio-symbolic identity. Indeed, it is highly evocative that Conrad actually inscribes in Razumov's physical appearance and personality qualities markedly similar to Lacan's delineation of the very process through which the University discourse configures a subject's consciousness. This young, aspirational student's face appears as if it is 'modelled vigorously in wax [and] had been held close to a fire till all sharpness of line had been lost in the softening of the material' (4). Conrad's emphasis on Razumov's fluid, undefined facial features almost seems to encode the operation of the University discourse in the shaping of the subject's ego, as when 'systematic knowledge is the dominant discursive factor, the recipients of the chain of knowledge must constitute themselves as formless objects' (Boucher 277) or 'amorphous, non-articulated substance' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 34) to be 'shaped to the requirements of the educational process' (Boucher 277). This wax-like, shapeless 'material' of Razumov's face provocatively echoes the 'formless', 'amorphous [...] substance' of the conscious subject ready to be configured according to the dictates of the dominant paradigm of knowledge.

Despite the explosion and assassination of Mr. de P----- and the volatile political atmosphere, Conrad presents Razumov's studious application as unwavering, as 'having prepared all the matters of the forthcoming examination' he now will 'devote his time to the subject of the prize essay. He hanker[s] after the silver medal' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 9). Yet embedded within this seemingly innocuous episode are multiple elements indicative of the latent, ideologically determined framework that underpins the University discourse and its implications for the status of the individual's identity that is composed within it. The Lacanian

model proposes, on the broader socio-symbolic level, that the role of the student within the University discourse is that of an intellectual agent generating an academic product that will only support the perpetuation of the dominant system of thought. The student must serve as the 'means of production' of the 'System' (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 56). Accordingly, the student 'produces something cultural [and] what one produces is a thesis' (Lacan, *Other Side* 190-91). As such, the student generates 'an elaboration or extension of The System['s]' knowledge which 'simply nourish[es] The System' (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 56) and enables it to continue. Mapping this operation onto Razumov's efforts as he prepares himself to work on the day of the assassination would then reveal that his attempt at the prize essay, his 'thesis', is clearly the production of knowledge that only serves to sustain the dominant ideological order of the symbolic.

This proposed interpretation might be easily dismissed but for the institutional mechanisms Conrad sketches revealing how the university will award the 'prize essay'. These are immediately visible as the 'prize [is] offered by the Ministry of Education [and] the names of the competitors w[ill] be submitted to the Minister himself' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 9). The University of St. Petersburg is situated as closely wedded to one of the ruling administrative structures of the socio-symbolic order, the 'Ministry of Education'. From a Lacanian standpoint this is unsurprising, as the 'university has an extremely precise function' which is the 'elucidation [or realisation]' of the 'master's discourse' (Lacan, *Other Side* 148). Behind the university discourse lies the '[m]aster['s] discourse of overt law and governance', which is 'suppressed' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 40). The Master's discourse will be examined later in the novel when it explicitly emerges with the appearance of General T---- and Prince K----. At this early stage, however, it is sufficient to note how the University discourse is a 'masked discourse' (Lacan, *Other Side* 148) which 'functions as an avatar of the [m]aster discourse, promulgating its master signifiers hidden beneath its systematic knowledge' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 40). What is suggested here is that the purpose of the production of

‘systematic knowledge’ inherent in the University discourse—and the very nature of this knowledge—is to serve the ruling agencies of the dominant social order, and continue to tacitly ‘promulgate’ its ideology.

This coextensiveness of the University discourse to the ruling bureaucracy is further evidenced by Razumov’s observation that the writer of the successful essay ‘would have a claim to an administrative appointment of the better sort after he had taken his degree’ (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 9). The social movement from student at university to official in government is presented as an almost seamless transition by Conrad, exposing the ideological proximity of the two agencies and supporting Lacan’s reference to the ‘tyranny of knowledge’ (*Other Side* 32) that is discernible not only in education but also in what in ‘ordinary language is called the bureaucracy’ (31) of government. As Bracher explains, ‘[b]ureaucracy is perhaps the purest form of the discourse of the University; [it is] pure impersonal system’ (Bracher, “Lacan’s Theory” 39). Razumov’s intellectual acumen and the very content of his thought, crystallised in his thesis submission for the ‘prize essay’, would therefore be judged according to the ruling ideology’s values. It would thus serve as an indication of the subject’s very suitability for being incorporated into these institutions and thereby sustaining their operation, which further attests to Conrad’s depiction of the inter-relationship between university and government in the initial sequence of the text. The latent significance of the ‘prize essay’ for Razumov is testament to how ‘[i]ndividuals are to act, think, and desire only in ways that function to enact, reproduce, or extend The System’ (Bracher, “Lacan’s Theory” 39) in the University discourse, and the extent to which Conrad suggests the university functions as a conduit towards supporting the ruling agencies of the socio-symbolic order. It is here that one can begin to see how the discourse of the Master ‘commands [and] intervenes in the system of knowledge’ (Lacan, *Other Side* 201) which is the university discourse, and how this discourse is ultimately ‘subservient’ (Bracher, “Lacan’s Theory” 40) to the Master’s.

### **Conflict and revolt: the appearance of the discourse of the Hysteric**

It is at this moment in the novel, as Razumov enters his lodgings with the hope of studying for the prize essay, that Conrad first introduces the figure of Victor Haldin, the perpetrator of the bombing which killed the government minister. With the conscious identity of Razumov positioned within the University discourse, it now becomes possible to discern what occurs when two subjects interact from opposing discourses. As Catherine Rising suggests, Haldin's introduction marks the appearance of the Hysteric's discourse in the text (Rising 33). This discourse is one that becomes the preeminent discourse in the Geneva section of the novel, and will be accordingly examined in greater detail when I consider that section. At its most basic level, the Hysteric's discourse is structurally antagonistic to the Master's discourse in the Lacanian matrix. It is a discourse of rebellion and revolt, where the subject is defined by 'non-satisfaction' with society's ruling agencies, so that 'the law is being called into question' (Lacan, *Other Side* 43) by the subject in the discourse. Its structure 'characterises [...] discourses involving resistance, protest and complaint' (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 66), and, in particular, it is evident in the 'iconoclastic rhetoric of revolutionaries' (66) and in the acts accompanying such rhetoric. It appears highly appropriate to conceive of Haldin as occupying this position of discourse. Prior to the act of bombing, he is labelled as 'restless' and 'unsound' by the governing authorities, and his immediate admission to Razumov, that '[i]t was I that removed de P--- this morning' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 12), only confirms him as being constituted within the Hysteric's discourse. He espouses 'iconoclastic rhetoric' as he describes the assassinated minister as one of society's 'true destroyers', who 'destroy the spirit of progress and truth' (15) and later refers to his act as 'not murder-it is war, war' (16). Further, Bracher identifies the Hysterical subject as one who displays a 'failure' to 'coincide with, or be satisfied with [...] the master signifiers offered by society'

(*Lacan Discourse* 66). Given that these signifiers in Russian society are those of 'Tsarism' and 'autocracy', Haldin's assassination of a key figure who helps sustain their symbolic primacy consolidates his subjective location.

From a Lacanian perspective, what becomes immediately apparent is the tension between Razumov's conscious ego and that of a subject situated in a contrasting discourse position. Upon hearing of Haldin's action, his colleague's conscious fantasy of the prize essay—a fantasy commensurate with the master signifiers of the University discourse—dissolves. Razumov feels that his life is 'utterly ruined by this contact with such a crime' and exclaims to himself that 'there goes my silver medal' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 12). Indeed, in his diary, Razumov refers to the 'appalling presence of a great crime and the stunning force of a great fanaticism' (18) in his conscious contemplation of Haldin's act. In terms of the contrasting master signifiers at work in Haldin and Razumov respectively, one can see how 'signifiers function as bearers of our identity' from subjects' 'reactions when someone attempts to either damage one of our identity-bearing signifiers' or 'deprive us of one' (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 23), or, indeed, through 'the alliances they form with and the wars they wage on other signifiers' (25). On the level of his egoic identity, Razumov visualises a series of punishments he would suffer if he transgresses the ideology underpinning his own dominant discourse. The active construction of 'he s[ees] himself' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 15-16) in various states of castigation all culminate in him being 'broken, ruined, and robbed of all hope' (16) which illustrates his conscious disapproval of Haldin's actions as they undermine his own master signifiers.

What becomes fundamentally significant here is the manner in which Conrad depicts Razumov's reaction to the justification Haldin offers him as to why he chose to seclude himself in Razumov's apartment. This reaction can be seen, in a Lacanian sense, as a pivotal moment of unconscious identification on Razumov's part, a crucial identification that, by definition, precludes his conscious identity and the master signifiers which help coordinate

and constitute his ego. Upon questioning, Haldin states that it is '[c]onfidence' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 14) that brought him to Razumov. Despite Conrad presenting Razumov with a 'brain [that] seethe[s] with arguments' (14), he says nothing, as this 'word seal[s] Razumov's lips as if a hand had been clapped on his mouth' (14). The question then arises as to whose hand this is – and it is highly tempting to suggest that Haldin's conscious identification with Razumov is an unconsciously mutual one. Indeed, Razumov 'wonder[s] why he ha[s] not cut short that talk and told this man to go away long before' as their conversation develops and wonders if it is a 'weakness' (15). Although consciously concluding it is 'sound instinct' (15), perhaps this hesitation is because Razumov, at an unconscious level, actually desires to remain with Haldin.

This assertion of a fundamental connection between the two students is supported by Jeremy Hawthorn, who argues that in *Under Western Eyes* these 'characters experience a mysterious sense of identification between themselves and another' (Hawthorn, "Generic" 42) and sees this as a 'link' that is 'drawn between an uncanny external presence and a part of the individual's inner being, a half of a divided self' (56), suggesting that Haldin embodies an externalised aspect of Razumov's internal conflict. While Hawthorn's argument is directed more towards the literature of the double, this in no way detracts from its implication of the unconscious bond between the two students. Even Razumov's later assumption of the same physical position that Haldin adopted on his bed prior to his arrest is used to assert that '[u]nconsciously, [Razumov's] hands and body have announced the strange identification with Haldin' (Gillon 138), and this association is again expounded by Ted E. Boyle who sees it as a 'subconscious identification' that is 'so great' (Boyle 203) Razumov is later forced to visualise Haldin's torture.

It is perhaps unsurprising, if this is indeed an unconscious identification on Razumov's part, that following this identification there occurs a powerful, compensatory reassertion of the master signifiers organising his conscious subjectivity within the University



discourse. Conrad portrays Razumov's consciousness as simply acknowledging that the institution of government 'appear[s] to him rational and indestructible at that moment. They ha[ve] a force of harmony-in contrast with the horrible discord of that man's presence' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 16). What can be elucidated here is the University discourse operating upon the subject to its most dissembling extent, wherein the ideological imperatives which underpin the governmental institutions are elided. It exemplifies the 'constitutive lie of the university [which] is that it disavows its performative dimension, presenting what effectively amounts to a political decision based on power as a simple insight into the factual state of things' (Žižek, "Four Discourses" 78). Razumov's perception of government as simply 'rational' and 'indestructible' does not suggest an ideologically-inflected subjective standpoint but rather one that construes them as part of the "factual state of things", the quotidian, *status-quo* of the everyday. That it offers him a feeling of 'harmony', in contrast to the feeling of 'discord' Haldin offers, amply illustrates how his ego is constituted in this discourse and further reflects how a subject desires to avoid a discourse that undermines his or her own subjective position, as what we 'seek is the repeated dominance of those signifiers that represent us. Discourses that offer this dominance usually give us a sense of security and well-being' (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 26). Razumov's 'harmony' appears indicative of this movement to assuage his ego and the reference to an 'indestructible' quality inherent in government institutions may enact his ego's reinforcement via those master signifiers of his discourse.

It becomes more discernible that Conrad begins to figure a sense of conflict within Razumov's conscious contemplation of Haldin's actions. Yet these subtle moments of conflict are repeatedly curtailed via the dominance of the master signifiers that coordinate his ego. As he departs his lodgings in his brief attempt to help Haldin escape, he continually emphasises the wrongness of Haldin's act, thinking of it as a 'crime' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 19) and that a 'murder is a murder' (20). What is highly suggestive of this conflict is that he appears to

question briefly this designation of the bombing as he momentarily reflects that '[t]hough, of course, some sort of liberal institutions...' (20). This flicker of thinking—a conscious questioning of the act—cannot even be completed as Conrad immediately curtails it, highlighting how a 'feeling of horrible sickness came over him' (20). The very act of considering an alternative ideological perspective clearly involves undermining the master signifiers which undergird his ego and thus is a subjective operation that is instinctively disrupted.

### **What lies behind the University discourse: the discourse of the Master**

It is within Conrad's depiction of Razumov confronting the drunken Ziemianitch during his futile attempt to rouse the carriage driver to assist in Haldin's escape, that one can detect the nascent existence of the Master's discourse. This is the discourse that lies behind and manipulates the University discourse, so that the University discourse functions as an 'avatar' of its ideology. Again, it is important to acknowledge the influence of Kojève on Lacan's understanding of Hegel and the concept of the Master. While the 'structure of the master's discourse postulated by Lacan follows the Kojèvean dynamic closely' (Kovacevic 127), in that the slave 'works for the master [...] producing *jouissance*' and 'found[s] his command' on 'being a divided subject' (127), Lacan fundamentally differs to Kojève in where he believes Master's discourse ultimately leads.

For Lacan, the discourse of the Master lies behind and controls the slave and the discourse of the University, and, while this 'new discourse', might appear to represent in some sense the supposed ascendancy of the slave, Lacan is in marked 'contrast to Kojève, as the psychoanalyst 'finds [this new discourse] as problematic as the master's discourse and therefore impotent to signal the end of history' (Kovacevic 128). In Lacan's model, it is only the discourse of the Analyst that offers the potential for subjective freedom, as

psychoanalysis is the 'subversive practice which undermines all attempts at domination and mastery' (Evans 47).

It is through a Lacanian analysis of this sequence that it may become possible to discern a deeper, more dormant critique of philosophy imbricated into the text by Conrad. The author delineates the stable in the manner of a cave, as he describes Razumov's passage 'through a small doorway into a long cavernous place like a neglected subterranean byre' (*Western Eyes* 21-22). Of course, by itself, this may not be significant, but what heightens the suggestiveness of this episode is how Conrad intersects his description of the locale with a repeated emphasis on its qualities of light, and specifically, shadow. The horses appear both 'motionless and shadowy in the dim light of the lantern' (22) but, more curiously, Conrad focuses upon the 'intense black spokes of shadow swung about in the circle of light' (22) cast by the lantern and reiterates this focus with the 'spoke-like shadows on the walls' (23) as Razumov repeatedly beats Ziemianitch in his frustration at the peasant's drunken sleep. It is highly relevant at this juncture to refer to the etymology of the protagonist's name. The 'name, "Razumov", essentially means the "son of reason," as one might translate the Russian' (GoGwilt 91) which clearly situates Razumov as an embodiment of the 'reasoning intellect' (91). This etymological association between Razumov and rationalism can be further strengthened by reminding oneself of the fact that he is a student of philosophy at the university.

With these visual insistencies on shadow and cavern alongside linguistic allusions to philosophy all intersecting at this precise moment, it is tempting to suggest that Conrad has imbricated into the text a subtle reference to Plato's allegory of the cave. The 'spoke-like shadows on the walls' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 23) are perhaps redolent of Plato's prisoners' perception of the 'shadows thrown by the fire on the wall of the cave' (Plato 317)—or Conrad's 'long cavernous place' (*Western Eyes* 21). Further, the prisoners' state as 'blinded' (Plato 320) is evoked through Ziemianitch's eyes which 'evidently s[ee] nothing' (Conrad,

*Western Eyes* 23). If this is the case, then it must appear as a highly critical reference. Supposing that Razumov is a representative of a particular form of philosophical reasoning then it would seem Conrad positions this strain of philosophy as a potential tool of repression and subjugation, given Razumov's horrific treatment of the carriage driver, rather than as an instrument of liberation and enlightenment as per Plato's intention.

From a Lacanian perspective, however, this criticism is apt. What appears, at first sight, to be 'seemingly autonomous and self-propelling knowledge' of the University discourse actually has a 'secret clause', which is that 'its truth is detained by the master' (Dolar, "Hegel" 136). Precisely, this imperative is that a form of knowledge—such as philosophy—is a knowledge subordinated to the discourse of the Master, and it is at this point in the novel where this process can be detected. Lacan argues that '[p]hilosophy has played the role of constituting a master's knowledge' (*Other Side* 148), which, as Bracher suggests, enables 'us to see that more specifically the basic function of philosophy is to articulate and promote certain master signifiers' ("Lacan's Theory" 41). In the Lacanian model, philosophy is an 'attempt to promote a certain way of speaking' which also becomes a way of 'thinking, feeling, desiring, and acting' (41). For Razumov's actions here, this thought and action is both exploitative and punitive in nature and the master signifier of 'autocracy' appears as the term underpinning the University discourse and active in the discourse of the Master itself.

During his beating of the unconscious man, Razumov has a realisation situated between 'the dream-intoxication of the peasant incapable of action and the dream-intoxication of the idealist incapable of perceiving the reason of things and the true character of men' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 23). Of course, one can again distinguish the 'disavowed' political inflection of the University discourse – Razumov perceives this situation as merely the 'reason of things'. However, the master signifier of autocracy appears to determine his consciousness, as his subjective comprehension of the events is characterised by the strict oppression of authoritarianism, imaged in his comment that 'children ha[ve] their masters'

and how he wishes to utilise ‘the stick, the stick, the stern hand’ (23) of the autocrat. It is further telling that Razumov acknowledges that he is ‘glad [to have] thrashed that brute’ (23). Crucially, these actions are shown by Conrad to relieve his ‘mental agitation’ which is left ‘clarified as if all the feverishness [goes] out of him in a fit of outward violence’ (23-24), again reinforcing Razumov’s identity as constituted within the dominant ideology of the autocratic Tsarism of the socio-symbolic order. Ultimately, this sequence can be aligned to the statement that one ‘factor that makes the discourse of the University so powerful and tyrannical is the force of its master signifiers, which operate, for the most part, surreptitiously’ (Bracher, “Lacan’s Theory” 40). Here, these signifiers assert themselves most forcefully in the Master’s discourse which underlies the University discourse.

It is at the moment where Razumov is forced to choose a definite course of action due to Ziemianitch’s drunkenness that the Master’s discourse which determines the University discourse begins to more aggressively coordinate his conscious contemplation. This determination becomes fully identifiable during the process of ideological interpellation that follows the episode in the cavern.

### **The ideological interpellation of Razumov**

It is perhaps unsurprising that after such a display of oppressive mastery and subjugation that Razumov is actively interpellated into a position in the socio-symbolic order that is explicitly supportive of the dominant ideology and confirms his ideological perspective as favouring autocracy. That Razumov does not have a ‘refuge’, a little ‘corner of the earth’ (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 24) to retreat to—familial or otherwise—foregrounds the ideological dimension of the conflict which he must resolve, an episode in which ‘Conrad, like Althusser, investigates how modern subjects are called into being’ (Long 492). The use of Althusser’s concept of interpellation is crucial to outline this process. Of course, it is also worth noting

Althusser's interest in Lacan's work which extends to writing on psychoanalysis, as well as helping Lacan to establish himself at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. The two men held an 'intellectual and professional alliance' (Valente 158), and, as well as enjoying a 'common maverick status' in the academy, they also 'shared' an initial 'commitment to the Structuralist method' (158) in their work. The concept of interpellation is 'defined as the fundamental mechanism of ideology' (Gillot 294), as Althusser argues that it 'constitute[s] concrete individuals as subjects' (Althusser 45). His process reveals how the individual might believe themselves to be a 'free, unique, irreplaceable subject', but that this belief is predicated on a 'fundamental misrecognition'. In fact, there is an '(unknowing) submission to ideology' (Gillot 295) achieved through the individual being 'hailed or "'interpellated'"' (294) by an agency representing the ruling forces. The '*interpellation* or hailing[,] which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police [...] hailing: "'You there!'"' (Althusser 48, italics in original) is the 'address of the Other which hails the subject and is integral to the process of subject formation' (Long 492). Accordingly, for Razumov in this sequence, it is 'not necessarily an external address [...] but is more of an internal one, involving a split in the subject' (492). It is through an intricate delineation of Razumov's 'internal', subjective imagination that Conrad presents what appears as this process of interpellation into the dominant ideology. Andrew Long suggests that for 'Razumov, the call is no longer external' and that 'Razumov is hailed twice; the first time when he feels called to inform-confess to his father, and the second time when he responds to Mikulin's "'suggestion'" that he reports on the anarchists in Geneva' (496). While I would agree that he is indeed interpellated, I would instead specify his interpellation as occurring in the process leading up to his choice of informing Prince K----<sup>10</sup>.

As Razumov desperately considers his choice of action after failing with Ziemianitch, Conrad depicts him as experiencing an 'almost physical impression of endless space and of countless millions', an impression of Russia in the abstract, where the author then presents a

series of elements that represent Russia in Razumov's mind. He envisages 'snow covering the endless forests, the frozen rivers, the plains of an immense country' and the 'landmarks, the accidents of the ground' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 25). Yet all of these elements are curiously rendered featureless as the snow acts to obscure any particular details inherent in them. Conrad portrays the snow as 'obliterating' and 'levelling everything under its uniform whiteness, like a monstrous blank page awaiting the record of an inconceivable history' (25). From a Lacanian perspective, this appears to be an exemplification of a subject's 'ideological space' that is made of 'non-bound, non-tied elements, "floating signifiers"', whose very identity is "open" – elements which are 'proto-ideological' and are awaiting to be 'structured into a unified field through the intervention of a certain "nodal point"' (Žižek, *Sublime* 95). The illustration of the 'forests', 'rivers', 'plains' and 'landmarks' of the 'immense country' of Russia as devoid of any positive identity due to the 'uniform whiteness' covering them enables them to be suggestively designated as these 'non-bound' elements whose 'identity is open' as Razumov ponders them.

Further, that they are then likened to a 'blank page awaiting the record of an inconceivable history' only intensifies the sense of their potential identity being structured into a 'unified field' through the imposition of a master signifier. Conrad immediately moves to fix the meaning of this 'blankness' for Razumov through an image encapsulating an autocratic leader. He sees what is needed as 'a will strong and one [...] a man, strong and one' (*Western Eyes* 25). This image of authoritarianism, which is then explicitly stated as 'autocracy' (25), functions as the 'nodal point' or 'Lacanian *point de capiton*' which then 'quilts' these previously 'blank' constituents, and 'performs the totalisation by means of which this free floating of ideological elements is halted, fixed – that is to say, by means of which they become parts of the structured network of meaning' (Žižek, *Sublime* 95-96). In this case, the 'network of meaning' is autocratic Tsarism and the master signifier binding them is, of course, 'autocracy' – a political philosophy that Conrad himself describes as

‘cutting off from air, from light, from all knowledge of themselves and the world, the buried millions of the Russian people’ (*Notes* 86).

The interpellation is further nuanced by Conrad as the process of the imposition of the master signifier, ‘autocracy’, which unifies the ideological field, is then elided and made to appear as inherent in the very conception of Russia. Razumov thinks how ‘many brave minds have turned away at last from the vain and endless conflict to the one great historical fact of the land. They turned to autocracy’ (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 25). What is visible here is a highly intricate shift between what is an explicit ideology seen as governing Russia in the second sentence—autocracy—but which in the preceding sentence is the ‘one great historical fact of the land’. This appears to be what Žižek labels the effect of ideological ‘transference’, which ‘consists of the illusion that the meaning of a certain element (which was retroactively fixed by the intervention of the master signifier) was present in it from the very beginning as its immanent essence’ (Žižek, *Sublime* 113). Here, the ‘land’ of Russia and all of its visual markers – ‘rivers’, ‘landmarks, *et al* – becomes inextricably ‘autocratic’ as its own ‘immanent essence’, as it is stated as a ‘historical fact’ – inevitable and concrete and existing prior to Razumov’s contemplation of it. What was actually a ‘blank page’ of unfixed meaning prior to the imposition of the master signifier of autocracy, now offers the illusion of always having been ‘autocratic’ and appears to him as the inevitable culmination of a process of ‘overpowering logic’ (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 25). So what can be seen here is the process where the ‘*point de capiton* [master signifier of autocracy] fixes the meaning of the preceding elements: that is to say, it retroactively submits them to some code, it regulates their mutual relations according to this code’ (Žižek, *Sublime* 114) which here are the ‘preceding elements’ of Russia’s ‘rivers’, ‘landmarks’ and ‘forests’, among others.

Conrad also imbricates a religious quality into Razumov’s experience of this imaginative sequence which strengthens the elision of this ‘radically contingent process of retroactive production of meaning’ (Žižek, *Sublime* 114) as he ‘st[ands] at the point of



conversion' before it and feels the 'touch of grace' upon himself. Moments later he feels that the 'grace enter[s]' into him and that he 'believe[s] now in the man who would come at the appointed time' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 26). Indeed, this notion of religion in Russia—more specifically the Russian Orthodox church—supporting autocracy is one that Conrad argues elsewhere, as he states that it does not have 'the right to give her voice in a single question touching the future of humanity' (*Notes* 99) due to its practice of repression. This quality of feeling is wholly commensurate with Žižek's concept of ideological interpellation, wherein the subject during the fixing of meaning through the master signifier, experiences it as a 'kind of transcendent guarantee' (*Sublime* 110) – an almost religious experience for the subject. The presence of the ideology is likened to an organic, linear process as opposed to a contingent action. It is likened to a 'seed [that] germinates in the night' which soon grows into the 'perfect plant' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 25).

With the meaning of Razumov's contemplation of Russia fixed and secure within the ideology of Tsarist autocracy, we now witness his conscious reflections as fully determined via the master signifier. The master signifier of 'autocracy' directs and coordinates his thinking, as he starts 'holding a discourse with himself with extraordinary abundance and facility' as if some 'superior power had inspired him with a flow of masterly argument' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 26) that enables him to justify his decision regarding the fate of Haldin. This reveals how the '*point de capiton*' is the point through which the subject is "'sewn"' to the signifier' and, more broadly with this whole sequence, the 'point which interpellates individual into subject by addressing it with the call of a certain master signifier ("'"Communism"'", "'God"'", "'Freedom"'", "'America"'")' (Žižek, *Sublime* 112) or, indeed, 'autocracy'. After this, Razumov again conveys the retroactive establishment of meaning which elides its own establishment, as he consoles himself with the image of the 'great autocrat of the future' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 26) where the 'logic of history made him

unavoidable' (26) – a process that seems 'linear, immanent, necessary progression' rather than 'radically contingent' (Žižek, *Sublime* 114).

### **Razumov's subject of the unconscious: a schism of the symbolic order**

Within a Lacanian interpretation, one can suggest that Razumov's ego—his conscious subjectivity—is rigidly constituted in the ruling elite's ideology of Tsarism which is part of the Master's discourse, via its 'avatar' of the University discourse. As discussed previously, the University discourse is the formational discourse that has shaped Razumov's egoic identity thus far in the novel, and the process outlined above supports 'the thesis that the university discourse is a discourse of interpellation, that is, of the formation of subjects to serve a social order' (Boucher 277). However, this must be qualified with the acknowledgement of the unconscious identification that has taken place between Haldin and Razumov. As such, the process of interpellation into the ruling ideology might therefore generate discord at the level of the unconscious. Indeed, at the very moment that Razumov appears to be rationalising his actions towards his betrayal of Haldin as he refers to his own 'cool superior reason' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 26), Conrad describes Razumov as halting his conscious rationalisation as he 'cease[s] to think for a moment' (26). The student then feels a 'suspicious uneasiness' like that of an 'unlighted strange place' which is 'irrational' and likened to an 'absurd dread of the unseen' (26). This disruption is perhaps reflective of an unconscious conflict of master signifiers born of his identification with Haldin, an identification hinted at by references to 'unseen' and 'irrational'.

Given the unyielding circumscription of his conscious thought following his interpellation, what then begins to occur is the repressing of any contradictory subjective position for Razumov. Haldin's act is unequivocally labelled a 'crime' (26) and Haldin himself becomes simply 'the withered branch which must be cut off' (27). This repression becomes

evident through Razumov ultimately externalising Haldin in a hallucination, where he sees ‘Haldin, solid, distinct, real, with his inverted hands over his eyes’ (27) with the snow surrounding him ‘untrodden’ (27). For Lacan, a hallucination is a manifestation of ‘what has been rejected from the symbolic [which then] reappears in the real’ (*Psychoses* 46), so that this ‘something *from* the symbolic [is] something foreign to and unrecognised by the subject, [but which] appears [...] *in* the real [italics in original]’ (Julien 73). What is ‘foreign’ to Razumov is his nascent identification with Haldin, which is contradictory to the master signifiers constituting his ego. Rather than engaging with this “return of the real” and attempting to integrate it into his subjectivity, Razumov ‘tackle[s] the phenomenon calmly’ and with a ‘stern face [...] walk[s] on’, and ‘experience[s] nothing but a slight tightening of the chest’ (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 28). This rational, considered action sees the culmination of this act of repression as Razumov then concludes that ‘I shall have to give him up’ (28) thereby fixing his conscious identity. This hallucination or ‘phantom haunts Razumov from the moment he thinks of betrayal when he ritualistically tramps over the apparition[. It] subsequently becomes a shadow in his life, both in Russia and Geneva’ (Erdinast-Vulcan, “Conradian Subject” 99). It is this ‘phantom’ that manifests the continual return of the real into his consciousness.

Accordingly, at this very point, one can witness a rupture in Razumov’s subjectivity between his conscious, egoic identity constituted through the master signifier of autocracy and what is his burgeoning and now repressed identification with Haldin. A characteristic pocket of blankness is inscribed into the text at precisely this moment by Conrad, as immediately following this conclusive decision to betray Haldin for ‘some twenty yards or more all was blank’ (*Western Eyes* 28). Much like the gap in Jim’s consciousness during his leap from the *Patna*, and the central absence of the explosion in *The Secret Agent*, Conrad incises an aporia into Razumov’s subjectivity, suggesting an eruption of the Lacanian real. This split is quintessentially Lacanian, as the ‘most prominent conflict underlying all specific

conflicts is between [...] ego and unconscious, each of which is constituted by an entire network of signifiers' (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 47-48) with Razumov's ego determined via the signifier of autocracy. As Lacan states, despite the conscious subject's position, 'along comes another discourse [and] other speech [*qua* unconscious]. It is quite certain that there'll be some places where they'll have to come to blows' (*Ego* 197). Corresponding to Razumov's repression of the identification and his decision to betray Haldin, the ego 'opposes an interpellation to positions that are incompatible with its master signifiers and their entailments' (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 48). However, in contrast to the configuration of Razumov's ego, the unconscious of the subject is 'composed of positions that [...] offer a particular Real jouissance' which 'are in themselves antithetical to the positions we have set up in our ego-ideal' (48). Ultimately, Lacan's model proposes that the 'unconscious is made of what the subject essentially fails to recognise in his structuring image, in the image of his ego' (48). It is feasible to suggest here that these 'antithetical', unrecognised elements are the identifications with Haldin's subject position in the Hysteric's discourse. Therefore, this caesura of blankness in Razumov's consciousness may be seen as indicative of the real, which is what Lacan identifies as a 'schism of the symbolic system' (*Freud's Techniques* 196), erupting at the precise moment his consciousness has tried to fix its meaning at the level of his ego.

After this 'schism' in the symbolic *qua* eruption of the real, Razumov merely 'realises' that this decision of betrayal is one wherein he 'simply discovered what he had meant to do all along' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 29). This further attests to what Žižek claims is the 'transferential illusion' which is the 'very measure of success of the operation of "'quilting"'': the *capitonnage* is successful only in so far as it effaces its own traces' (*Sublime* 113). The operation of interpellation for Razumov is utterly effaced, as his decision is retroactively deemed an action which was always going to occur. The conflict between ego and unconscious is firmly established within his subjectivity and the unconscious position he has

now adopted will constantly seek to disrupt his egoic identity. This can be discerned as Conrad depicts Razumov as briefly gripped with the desire to confess to Haldin following his decision to betray him. Destablilising his identity, Razumov suddenly yearns to ‘pour out a full confession in passionate words that would stir the whole being of that man to its innermost depths; that would end in embraces and tears; in an incredible fellowship of souls’ (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 29-30). This fantasy sequence appears to clearly articulate his unconscious subjective position, one aligned with Haldin’s own discourse. This very fantasy situates Razumov in an ‘antithetical’ subject positon to his conscious, egoic interpellation in the ideology of autocracy and affirms the identification with Haldin that is the object of his repression. That this unconscious position offers Razumov a ‘particular Real jouissance’ unavailable to his ego is hinted at by Conrad’s description of the student feeling momentarily ‘sublime’ (*Western Eyes* 30) as he glimpses the fantasy.

#### **Prince K---- and General T----: the Master’s discourse and the manipulation of Razumov**

The action of Razumov to seek out Prince K---- signals a transition for Razumov’s subjectivity from the University discourse into the subordinate position of the Master’s discourse. What was latent and hidden, yet still determined Razumov’s ego in the University discourse, now emerges as an explicit structure governing his subjectivity as Conrad reveals the highest echelons of government at work in the disposal and use of the student.

The Master’s discourse is a structure represented in Lacanian algebra as (S1) or master, ordering and controlling the (S2) or slave. This is where the ‘master addresses the slave’ and the subject in the active, dominant position, the (S1), ‘must be obeyed’ (Fink, *Subject* 131) by the slave, in (S2). This structure of authority is apparent in all ‘discourses that promote mastery’ and ‘order knowledge’ (Bracher, “Lacan’s Theory” 40) according to their own values and is ‘particularly evident in attempts to promote a particular philosophy or

politics' (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 60) which for Prince K---- and General T---- is clearly autocratic Tsarism. Prince K----, for Razumov, is evidently such a figure of authority, as he thinks of him as a 'senator, a dignitary, a great personage' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 30). Given that Razumov's ego is constituted through the ideology of Tsarism, it is logical that he would seek another subject that would confirm and augment this subjective position. This conscious affirmation is discernible as Razumov feels himself 'invulnerable' with great 'lucidity of mind' (31) as he is granted an audience with the prince, reflecting how a subject seeks the 'passive narcissistic gratification of dwelling with circuits of discourse controlled by our master signifiers' (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 26) in order to maintain their identity.

Prince K----'s offer to 'see [Razumov] through this most extraordinary and difficult situation' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 31) conveys on one hand his obvious interest in his illegitimate son's welfare. It also suggests the extent to which Razumov is a subject that can be located or positioned by this dominant figure within the socio-symbolic order, a potential which is keenly exploited by General T---- in his plan to capture Haldin. Razumov is even aware of this very capacity when he observes that he is the general's 'helpless prey' (37). In the Master's discourse, the 'helpless prey' is the 'slave' (Lacan, *Other Side* 21), the 'one in the position of powerlessness' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 43), who is placed in the position of the 'worker' (Lacan, *Other Side* 105) and comes to embody the 'support of knowledge' (21) or S2. Clearly, Razumov offers knowledge, as Prince K---- states to General T---- that '[w]e have got him – *ce miserable*. A worthy young man came to me' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 33) as Razumov then recounts his experiences and his knowledge is manipulated by the senior personage. That Razumov is put to work for them is evident as General T---- concocts his plan to 'be ready for that gentleman in Karabelnaya' (37) and orders Razumov to 'return to his home' (38) in preparation for Haldin's arrest. Razumov is probed, considered and then disposed of according to the Master's requirements – a sequence that is continued later with the appearance of Councillor Mikulin who also seeks to utilise Razumov's 'great and useful

quality of inspiring confidence' (36) in order to sustain the dominant power structures.

Further, Conrad's depiction of General T---- appears to clearly embody the key traits of the active, dominant agent in the Master's discourse. The 'master signifier functions more simply in the master's discourse' (Lacan, *Other Side* 93), as the 'most salient structural feature of the discourse [is] the dominance of the master signifier' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 43). For the general, this signifier is obviously that of autocracy, as it determines his conscious identity. It is openly declared that he 'detest[s] rebels of every kind' and his political perspective is figured by Conrad as an innate feature of his identity, as he 'can't help it' and it is simply in his 'nature' (*Western Eyes* 37). He is presented by Conrad as wholly characterised by a desire to suppress dissent; he asserts that the revolutionaries 'shall be destroyed' (38) with 'one effort, pitiless, persistent, steady – and we are done with them for ever' (38), as well as having 'fidelity' (38) to autocracy itself. Indeed, the ruthless suppression of rebellion is commensurate with the Master's discourse, as it generates 'murderous effects' and is associated with the repressive mechanisms of 'imperialism' (Lacan, *Other Side* 178), so that it 'exercises an extremely powerful force in all spheres of human life' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 42). This brutality is firmly identifiable in General T----'s 'bright, cruel smile' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 35) and wish to make Haldin 'sing a little before we are done with him' (34). It is in Razumov's own perception of the general that perhaps this quality of the 'dominance of the master signifier' is most detectable, as he later thinks of the General T---- as the 'embodied power of autocracy, grotesque and terrible' (62) and the 'incarnate ruthlessness of a political and social regime on its defence' (62).

Crucially, this surety of purpose and absolute, unyielding sense of self-identity is a fundamental structure of the subject constituted in the dominant position of the Master's discourse, the S1 or 'I of the master' (Lacan, *Other Side* 62). For Lacan, this structure is primarily defined by discourses that promote the 'myth of the ideal I, of the I that masters' and believes it is 'identical to itself' (63), so that the structure 'valorise[s] and attempt[s] to

enact an autonomous, self-identical ego. [It] promotes consciousness, synthesis, and self-equivalence' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 41). Conrad's figuration of General T---- is conducive to this, as it is simply in his 'nature' (*Western Eyes* 37) to hate revolution, and his 'existence has been built' (38) on such certitude. It is telling how Razumov observes that a 'man entrusted with so much arbitrary power must have believed what he said or else he could not have gone on bearing the responsibility' (38). However, it is in the visual qualities Conrad inscribes into the general's mien that one can detect vital similarities to Lacan's own figuration of how the master signifier operates in the Master's discourse. The effects of its capacity to fix and shape identity are seen in images that convey a 'selfsame, static, frozen' or 'lifeless' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 36) quality. It is highly suggestive that Conrad presents General T---- with an 'immobility' of 'profile' (*Western Eyes* 33) and a 'stony stare' (35), that he 'betray[s] no sentiment whatsoever' (33) and that for Razumov it is 'impossible to detect any sign of emotion' (33), reflecting these 'static' and 'frozen' characteristics. Also, Conrad's description of the room having the 'silence of the grave' (32) and moments later a 'grave-like silence' (34) temptingly echoes Lacan's reference to the 'address of death' (*Other Side* 209), or deadened property, that defines the master.

Now explicitly directed by and constituted within the Master's discourse, Razumov's return to his apartment and subsequent manipulation of Haldin fully accords with the wishes of General T----. That Razumov displays 'malicious pleasure' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 37) when speaking of Haldin's planned arrest with General T---- and further experiences a 'temptation to grip [Haldin's] exposed throat and squeeze the breath out of his body' (43) as he waits with the revolutionary, confirms the extent to which his consciousness is coordinated by the Master's discourse and General T----'s desire to 'destroy' while any unconscious identification is firmly repressed. It is striking that at this very moment of Razumov's utter acquiescence to the dominant ideology of the socio-symbolic order, Conrad imbricates into the narrative an affirmation of and reference to secure geometrical forms redolent of the recurring figuration



of mathematical shapes in *The Secret Agent*. He describes Razumov as 'going on with his aimless drawings of triangles and squares' (42) as he talks to Haldin. This recalls Conrad's presentation of a certain form of geometrically-inflected rationalism subordinated to the dominant ideology of the socio-symbolic order which is explored in my previous chapter. These shapes, most specifically the triangle, are often associated with Verloc, who helps sustain the ruling ideology through his activities. It also is suggestive of Lacan's subject of science which I will touch upon momentarily.

As Haldin speaks with Razumov, he is likened to the 'statue of a youth listening to an inner voice' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 47), which Hawthorne notes may be connected to the other statue of a youth first seen in General T----'s home. This reduction of Haldin down into an object available for scrutiny from all sides appears commensurate with the capacity of the Master's discourse to both scrutinise and organise the knowledge, the (S2), within its sight – in this case the target of Haldin. Following Haldin's exit, Conrad depicts another episode that, from a Lacanian perspective, offers an insight into the internal conflict of Razumov's psyche. The anxious Razumov is portrayed as 'fumblingly' (47) trying to ascertain the time, and 'looking down at the white dial' of his watch so as to accurately be able to identify the precise moment of Haldin's imminent arrest. Curiously, as Razumov performs this action, Conrad also portrays a 'strange fit of nervelessness' that jars the student, so that 'the watch and chain slip [...] through his fingers' (47) and break, with Razumov so 'startled that he nearly f[alls] himself' (47).

At the level of his conscious ego, Razumov is, of course, keen to confirm the precise time in order to be aware of the moment the arrest would occur. This action would finally conclude and locate Haldin's situation in the symbolic order and the timing would resolve any ambiguity surrounding Haldin's potential escape. However, Razumov "accidentally" drops the watch at exactly the same moment of attempting to confirm the time. At the level of his unconscious, this event appears to be an attempt to disavow his conscious position of having

betrayed his colleague. It is an attempt to arrest the passage of time in the symbolic prior to the effects of his betrayal manifesting in the arrest. The profound extent of this unconscious disavowal can be seen by the violent effect it has on Razumov's whole person, as he almost 'f[alls]' when dropping the watch. As such, it functions as an example of psychoanalytic 'parapraxis' or a 'bungled act' (Lacan, *Other Side* 58). Crucially, these actions are 'bungled' only 'from the point of view of the conscious intention' (Evans 2) as they are 'always successful' (Lacan, *Other Side* 58) from the perspective of 'expressing an unconscious desire' (Evans 2), which is here the rejection of his symbolic reality. Given that the student's ego is predicated upon the approval of General T---- and constituted within the dominant ideology of the socio-symbolic order, it is unsurprising that Conrad portrays Razumov searching 'wildly about as if for some means of seizing upon time which seem[s] to have escaped him altogether' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 48). As already discussed, Razumov's ego would need to anchor itself via symbolic coordinates—the measurement of time—as it would resolve Haldin's situation and confirm his own conscious identity.

After the 'deep boom' of the city clock which serves to punctuate the moment of Haldin's arrest, Conrad presents Razumov as taking a 'square sheet of paper' (48) which is 'blank' (49) and upon which, the student 'beg[ins] to write' (49). It is in Conrad's depiction of this episode that one can discern a subjective process that strikingly appears to both repeat and confirm his earlier interpellation into the dominant ideology of autocracy and his position as subordinated to the Master's discourse. Suggestively, Razumov is shown to write in an 'almost childish' form, which 'los[es] its 'character altogether' (49) as if he is being determined by a force that is greater than his own consciousness – the Master's discourse. Most importantly, it is the style of his writing that most keenly insinuates the effects of his prior interpellation. Razumov writes 'five lines' (49) of paired, contrasting concepts, through which he unequivocally asserts a conservative, autocratic ideological stance. He proclaims 'History not Theory', 'Patriotism not Internationalism' and 'Unity not Disruption' (49) among

others – all supportive of the master signifier of ‘autocracy’. What is striking however about this sequence is not the choice of terms but rather that Conrad does not show Razumov offering any substantive, concrete content for any of the terms he asserts as dominant. This process appears to support Žižek’s identification of how the *point de capiton* or master signifier works in its demarcation of an ideological field. Žižek contends that autocracy or, for example, democracy is ‘defined not by the positive content of this notion (its signified) but only by its positional-relational identity – by its opposition, its differential relation to “non-democratic” [or ‘non-autocratic’] – whereas the concrete content can vary to the extreme’ (*Sublime* 109). Ultimately then, by ‘itself it is nothing but a “pure difference”’: its role is purely structural’ (109) in the same way that, for Razumov, ‘History’ is not substantiated but simply differentiated against what is deployed as the oppositional term of ‘Theory’.

Immediately following this display of ideological logic, Conrad then delineates a dream sequence in which Razumov’s imagination exhibits a subjective structure highly similar to that of Lacan’s subject of science as examined in my chapter on *The Secret Agent*. Razumov’s dream exposes a configuration of imagery highly redolent of this subject’s rationalised and mathematical qualities. In the same way that the subject of science conceives of the world as whole, spherical, and a complete object available for full rational comprehension situated ‘over there’—demonstrative of its geometrical constitution—so too Razumov’s dream enacts this same organisation. He dreams of an ‘immense, wintry Russia which, somehow, his view could embrace in all its enormous expanse as if it [is] a map’ (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 49). In the same way that the socio-symbolic order of *The Secret Agent* is constituted as a comprehensible, scrutable unity subordinate to the ruling elite, so is Russia now sutured into a coherent whole for the recently interpellated subject of the dominant ideology to perceive as he dreams.

### **Under the western eyes of the Master's discourse: the teacher of languages**

At this juncture it becomes imperative to consider a broader, more tectonic mode of the Master's discourse at work in *Under Western Eyes* and one which involves questions of narrative form and structure. This is a manifestation of the discourse that configures the very shape, form and order of the text – the role of the narrator, the Anglo-Russian Teacher of Languages and figure that translates Razumov's diary. The identification of the Teacher of Languages as embodying the active agent in the Master's discourse enables a more fundamental, inceptive dimension of the discourse to be revealed. In Lacanian thought, the Master's discourse holds a 'privileged place in the four discourses; it constitutes a sort of primary discourse (both phylogenetically and ontogenetically)' (Fink, *Subject* 130). Fink's reference to its phylogenetic property is particularly apt, insofar as the Teacher acts as the 'fundamental matrix' (130) of discourse in the novel – connecting, organising and operating as a defining axis and conduit for the characters' interrelationships. He is, as per the Master's discourse, responsible for the conception of the overall structure of discourse *qua* the narrative, as the 'Master's gesture is the founding gesture of every social link' (Žižek, "Four Discourses" 77). As such, the teacher is the master in narrative terms, and he dictates the structure of the narrative discourse itself. The only disruption and resistance to this structure is enacted through the discourse of the Analyst, articulated through the figures of Natalia Haldin and her speech which evades the understanding of the Teacher – a point that is made later when discussing this particular discourse.

Of course, the Teacher displays traits of the discourse that are commensurate with those exhibited by General T----. One can easily transpose the equation of Lacanian algebra in

the Master's discourse of S1, the master, controlling and manipulating S2, the symbol representing the field of knowledge. Earlier, this reflected General T----'s manipulation of Razumov, as the student possessed the knowledge of the assassination and was used accordingly by the general. Here, one can identify the Teacher as S1, the master, controlling and shaping Razumov's diary, the S2 or knowledge, into the narrative of the text – illuminating a different aspect of the way the 'master's discourse [...] commands [and] intervenes in the system of knowledge' (Lacan, *Other Side* 201).

More pertinently, the commensurate traits are specifically those that 'valorize and attempt to enact an autonomous, self-identical ego' and 'self-equivalence' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 41) and are apparent to an even greater extent than in the case of the general. For Žižek, the 'illusion' of the master is the 'complete co-incidence between the level of the enunciation (the subjective position from which I am speaking) and the level of the enunciated content' ("Four Discourses" 76), which for the Teacher is his professed role as narrator and then the 'enunciated content' of the narration itself. What 'characterises the Master is a speech-act that wholly absorbs me, in which "'I am what I say,'" in short, a fully realized, self-contained performative' (76). This 'complete coincidence' is soon revealed to be an 'illusion' and disjunctive – a split between the Teacher's explicitly avowed purpose and the discernible effects of his role that gradually become evident. Conrad initially presents the narrator's awareness of purpose as strictly functional in nature, as he declares that 'I wish to disclaim the possession of those high gifts of imagination and expression' that he suggests would allow him to 'create' (*Western Eyes* 3). This position of utility is repeatedly emphasised in the establishing pages as he points out that 'the readers of these pages will be able to detect in the story the marks of documentary evidence' and reiterates that it is 'based on a document' (3), while stating unambiguously that 'all I have brought to it is my knowledge of the Russian language' (3). These proclamations suggestively appear to exemplify this purported 'fully realized, self-contained performative' that initially displays a 'complete

coincidence' between who the Teacher of Languages states he is and the scope of what he would actively perform in the role of narrator.

While this is the identity the Teacher consciously projects, Conrad quickly inscribes into the narrative actions that contradict and undermine this asserted function. Immediately after his distancing himself from any semblance of creativity, he then proceeds to describe eloquently the character of the Russian people that he later claims to be unable to comprehend in a conversation with Natalia Haldin. He describes of how they 'cherish' words and 'pour them out' with 'sweeping abundance' – a 'digression' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 4) which he quickly apologises for making. While this appears innocuous at first glance, these 'digressions' tellingly become more profound as the narrative progresses. As Dapha Erdinast-Vulcan trenchantly observes, there is an 'unresolved oddity' at the 'structural level' of the novel (*Modern Temper* 126). What starts off as the 'pedantic citation of documents and sources and the careful demarcation of the story and the narrator's comments on it', as discussed above and tirelessly reiterated by the Teacher, become 'suddenly loosened in Part III, in which the narrator often "walks into" his story' (126). While I fully concur with Erdinast-Vulcan's designation of this disjunction as a 'sudden dissolution of the structural border-lines between the narrator and his protagonist' (126), I would locate its motive force as inherent in the very structure of the Master's discourse itself – its occluded, latent level that is not consciously perceived by the active agent in the master's position.

Despite the master being caught in the 'illusion' of a 'complete-coincidence' (Žižek "Four Discourses" 76) between speech and action, this merely disguises the fact that he has, in reality, 'repressed his own self-division' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 43). He is a 'castrated' (Lacan, *Other Side* 97) being that is 'fundamentally, completely blind' in his 'foundation' (108). Essentially, a slippage between his assumed role and his actions is an inevitable and inherent element in the discourse's very structure, as no conscious subject, no matter how strenuously they assert a 'self-equivalence', can be fully in control of his discourse (the

pronoun, 'his', reflects both the Teacher's role in the text as well as Lacan's own problematic designation of the master as male. This usage can be connected back to the symbolic order being mediated through the phallus as examined in my first chapter). A secondary, equally apparent, implication of this unawareness of 'self-division' is that the master is 'oblivious to the cause of his own desire' (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 64). This obliviousness, or perhaps wilful blindness, is visible in the narrator's discernible but unacknowledged sexual desire for Natalia Haldin. Indeed, the Teacher is 'obviously in love with the girl, but persistently disqualifies himself as a lover' (Erdinast-Vulcan, *Modern Temper* 122) as this desire is only visible via indirect association. One such example of this indirectness is when the Teacher considers Mrs Haldin's, the mother's, predicament while eating dinner, and then states if 'anybody wishes to remark that this was a roundabout way of thinking of Natalia Haldin, I can only retort that she was well worth some concern' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 234). What perhaps inadvertently betrays a deeper, unacknowledged desire is the Teacher's reference to his own dinner during this contemplation as a 'lonely bachelor's meal' (234) – as if the designation of his meal and its marital implications as such redirects his thinking towards the figure of Natalia. Further, while there are brief moments of physical admiration, tellingly when he observes the 'seductive grace of her youthful figure' (255), he himself remains simply a 'castrated', voyeur-like figure looking on ineffectually.

Further to this structural 'dissolution' of narrative 'border-lines', a disjointedness between avowed role and actual effect is also detectable in the narrative on an ideological level, as Conrad presents what appears to be an interpolative operation imbricated into the fabric of his narration – an operation directed toward the readers of the text themselves. In direct contrast to the Teacher's initial self-positioning as being only a translator, which he claims is an 'occupation which at length becomes fatal to whatever share of imagination, observation and insight' (*Western Eyes* 4) someone may have, Conrad then alters his function as the Teacher enacts a narrative process fundamentally different to mere translation. After

delineating Razumov's own interpellation and manipulation within the Master's discourse of autocracy, the Teacher then reveals that the 'task is not in truth the writing in the narrative form *a précis* of a strange human document, but the rendering – I perceive it now – of the moral conditions ruling over a large portion of this earth's surface' (50). This enlargement of purpose is then complicated by the Teacher. He consciously foregrounds the challenge of the audience's understanding when he suggests Russian 'moral conditions' are very difficult for the reader to comprehend and are 'conditions not easily to be understood' (50).

What is then performed is an ideological sleight-of-hand similar in structure to Razumov's own interpellation evident earlier. The reader's potential understanding, in the Teacher's view, remains impossible 'till some key-word is found; a word that could stand at the back of all the other words covering the page' (50). This 'key-word' would exercise a structuring effect over 'all the words' of the page and would render the whole of the document comprehensible – a word 'which, if not truth itself, may perchance hold truth enough to help the moral discovery which should be the object of every tale' (50). The function of this 'word' appears indistinguishable from that of Žižek's *point de capiton*, or master signifier, deployed within the discourse of the Master to make a field of discourse comprehensible according to the ideological dictates of the master himself. It is this word which will establish the context of understanding for the reader – guiding and determining their production of meaning and their 'moral discovery'. This enables a different dimension of the 'dominance' of the master signifier to be understood, that 'when one reads or hears such a discourse, one is forced, in order to understand the message, to accord full explanatory power and/or moral authority to the proffered master signifiers', and, additionally, to then 'refer all other [...] objects, concepts or issues' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 43) to them as well.

Conrad then presents the Teacher as distancing himself from the diary in an act of deliberative contemplation as he 'turn[s] over for the hundredth time the leaves of Mr. Razumov's record' as the 'word that persists in creeping under [the pen's] point is no other



word than “‘cynicism’” (*Western Eyes* 50). Disguising the agency behind this decision so that the signifier itself is presented as an inevitable inclusion, the *point de capiton* of ‘cynicism’ is deployed. As soon as the master signifier is in place, it is used as a point of departure for the Teacher of Languages to determine the reader’s understanding as he goes on to state that it is this ‘cynicism’ which is the ‘mark of Russian autocracy and of Russian revolt’ (50) and the ‘spirit of Russia is the spirit of cynicism’. The master signifier is employed to contextualise discourse from all echelons of Russian society for the audience, from the ‘statesman’ and the ‘theories of her revolutionists’ to the utterances of its ‘prophets’ (50). This process realises Žižek’s contention—in the same way as with Razumov earlier—that the ‘*point de capiton* [master signifier of cynicism] fixes the meaning of the preceding elements: that is to say, it retroactively submits them to some code, it regulates their mutual relations according to this code’ (*Sublime* 114). This highly intricate engineering of narrative wherein multiple ideological strategies are encoded is simply dismissed by the Teacher as another ‘digression’ (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 50) for which he apologises. He then places ultimate responsibility for the digression upon Razumov himself, claiming it ‘proceeds’ from the student’s ‘conservative convictions’ (50) – an act which appears almost as an attempt to efface the ideologically-inflected character of its own enactment.

What becomes highly suggestive here is that an operation that interpellates the subjectivity of Razumov into the dominant ideology of Tsarism also appears to be present within the ideology of the narrator – Western capitalist democracy. Tsarism, of course, is the ideology that the Teacher of Languages takes considerable efforts to distance from the west as often as possible. Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan argues that the narrator attempts this process through ‘align[ing] himself with the readers by repeatedly referring to “‘we westerners’” [and] “‘we occidentals’”, [so that] what he keeps saying, in fact, is “‘you and I are elsewhere’” (Erdinast-Vulcan, “Conradian Subject” 101) and in a different ideological situation to the Russian characters. This presence of similar interpolative strategies implies

that Conrad sees more similarities between the operations of these ostensibly different ideologies than the Teacher of Languages cares to admit. It would seem that Conrad deliberately utilises the staunch ideological perspective of the Teacher—as a figure who desperately attempts to firmly demarcate the political differences between west and east—to illuminate their similarities by subtly undermining this strict bifurcation. The Teacher is shown to constantly affirm this bifurcation – he assures the reader that ‘this is not a story of the West of Europe’ (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 19) and that it would be ‘unthinkable that any young Englishman should find himself in Razumov’s situation’ (19), while stating to Natalia Haldin that he fails to understand the meaning of a conversation between two of the Russians despite acknowledging that ‘I’ve understood all the words’ (79) – he frequently distances and seeks to contain the ideological properties and operations of Russia as alien. By drawing attention to these strategic and tactical similarities that span multiple ideological positions, Conrad clearly suggests that the workings of opposing ideologies are much closer than the agents of these ideologies would care to admit.

### **Razumov in the ‘modern’ discourse of the Master**

Following the elucidation of the Teacher’s own act of interpellation upon his audience, it is necessary to ascertain the continued subjective effects of the Master’s discourse upon Razumov. Following his act of betrayal, Razumov’s conscious identity is clearly coordinated within the ideology of autocracy. It is unsurprising then, that upon his discovery of his rooms being searched by the representatives of this discourse, the ‘policemen of the district’ and a ‘very superior gentleman in a fur coat’ (57), that Razumov experiences a sense of egoic dissolution. Given that the subject’s ego seeks the ‘passive narcissistic gratification of dwelling with circuits of discourse controlled by our master signifiers’ (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 26) in order to maintain its coherency—these ‘circuits’ here being those of

autocratic Tsarism—Razumov's apparent discovery of being scrutinised by these very 'circuits' consequently undermines this process. In Lacanian terms, the ego is a structure constituted outside of itself, as examined in the discussion of Lacanian space in my previous chapter, and thus is dependent on its external relationship to other subjects and the symbolic order. When this is called into question, the effects are deleterious. Appropriately, Conrad describes Razumov suddenly feeling that this 'disorder affect[s] him profoundly, unreasonably' (*Western Eyes* 57) but crucially that he 'ha[s] the distinct sensation of his very existence being undermined in some mysterious manner' and of his 'moral supports falling away' (57), reflective of the destabilising of his egoic identity. This experience intensifies as Razumov receives a summons from 'the superior direction of the police' (62) who he believes now regard him as a 'suspect'.

It is in Razumov's first interview with Councillor Mikulin that we can discern the presence of a further dimension of the Master's discourse, as Conrad reveals that Mikulin is a 'chief of a department in the General Secretariat, with a rank in the civil service equivalent to that of a colonel in the army' (64). Conrad's comparison of Mikulin's governmental status to that of a senior army officer aligns General T----'s role with that of the councillor as two powerful figures of control and authority and appears to confirm the assertion that 'the discipline of governance and the field of politics are the paradigms of the master's discourse' (Boucher 275) as General T---- also clearly exercises power and influence in these two areas. In Mikulin's case, his bureaucratic function as civil servant also situates him in the University discourse – as Bracher suggests '[b]ureaucracy is perhaps the purest form of the discourse of the University; it is nothing but knowledge' (*Lacan Discourse* 55). This does not contradict the Master's discourse, but rather exemplifies and elaborates their coextensiveness, as Lacan specifically terms the University discourse in some instances as the 'modernized master's discourse' (*Other Side* 35) given the ubiquity of bureaucracy in governing social institutions. Hence, as a 'bearded bureaucrat' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 70) who beckons Razumov into his

offices with 'the penholder he [is] holding in his hand' (64) and figure who then proceeds to manipulate the student, Councillor Mikulin can be seen as bridging these two discourses. It is interesting to note the observation that the master controls the capacity of speech. In the discourse he holds the role of 'speaker', in contrast to the slave 'who has no voice' and is obviously in the 'position of powerlessness' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 43). Suggestively, Conrad depicts their first moment of conversation in a manner that enacts this subjective dynamic, as Razumov appears to concede his capacity of speech to the senior civil servant, as 'the faculty of speech seem[s] to leave him and enter the body of Councillor Mikulin' (*Western Eyes* 65) when their dialogue begins.

After an initial tension, once Razumov asks Mikulin to 'allow me the superiority of the thinking reed' (66) as he invokes his intellectualism as a 'thinker', Mikulin's response that 'I too consider myself a thinking man' (67) generates an effect of subjective identification with Razumov so that his 'tension [is] relaxed' (67). Conrad's figuration of this mutual intellectual recognition between the men also appears to function as a subtle allusion to the discourse of philosophy itself. The figure of Mikulin is described as thoughtful and 'ponderous' by Conrad and bearing a 'rugged Socratic forehead' (67) – a 'resemblance' that would 'naturally occur to a student of philosophy such as Razumov' (Hawthorn, *Western Eyes* 292). This philosophical allusion perhaps augments the view that Razumov's earlier beating of Ziemianitch articulates Conrad's veiled critique suggesting a certain form of philosophy works as an instrument of oppression. This potentially oppressive facet of philosophy is enacted through the philosophy student beating a peasant, but also is encoded into the physiognomy of Mikulin. This authoritarian figure, who remarks so offhandedly that he 's[ees] no object in delaying the execution' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 69), is likened to Socrates. More important, in a Lacanian context, however, is that the presence of philosophical discussion in this episode emphasises how philosophy is a form of knowledge in service to the Master. This moment again reflects Lacan's reliance on Kojève's interpretation of Hegel, as Mikulin displays both the

‘aggressiveness’ (Lacan, *Écrits* 98) and the ‘sterile tyranny’ (99) of the Master that defines his relationship to the slave and knowledge.

As discussed earlier in regards to the University discourse and Razumov’s subject of study, Lacan suggests that philosophy ‘play[s] the role of constituting a master’s knowledge’ (*Other Side* 148) which necessitates ways of ‘thinking, feeling, desiring, and acting’ (Bracher, “Lacan’s Theory” 41). This subjective procedure, which Lacan posits philosophy as enacting for the Master’s discourse, appears uncannily close to what Councillor Mikulin explicitly outlines as the necessary parameters to observe in the pursuit of thought. After designating himself a ‘thinking man’, he then revealingly states that the ‘principal condition is to think correctly’ (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 67). To think ‘correctly’ clearly means, in this context, to think within the confines of the ideology of autocracy, lending credence to Lacan’s insight that the ‘basic function of philosophy is to articulate and promote certain master signifiers’ – here the master signifier of autocracy itself. Mikulin’s statement<sup>11</sup>, viewed in conjunction with his ‘Socratic’ aspect, and made while in a conversation specifically about thought with a student of philosophy, appears to strongly endorse Lacan’s assertion that a certain form of philosophy is indeed subordinated to the figure of the Master in his discourse. It further suggests that Conrad himself may view philosophy as a discourse articulating the interests of a dominant elite.

The level of control the master enjoys is ominously insinuated in Mikulin’s seemingly innocuous final question to Razumov—‘[w]here to?’ (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 74)—that ends the first part of the novel, as the question reflects an ‘intellectual and existential purchase far more appalling than its topographical reference’ (Hawthorn, ‘Introduction’ xiv). Instead of the topographical, it rather ‘epitomizes [...] the non-availability of any subject-position’ (Juhász 88) outside of the master’s power to delimit and circumscribe the subject within his remit.

## Geneva and the discourse of the Hysteric

Following this exchange between Mikulin and the student of philosophy, Conrad then shifts the narrative to the locale of Geneva. It is in this sequence of the novel that one can discern the effects upon Razumov's subjectivity of his spying on the revolutionists – a subject located within the Master's discourse is situated in opposition to the Hysteric's discourse. Prior to tracing Razumov's own subjective progression, it is Conrad's depiction of Geneva that first offers a network of multiple subjects constituted within the discourse of the Hysteric. As previously discussed with the bombing by Victor Haldin, this discourse is characterized by a 'non-satisfaction' (Lacan, *Other Side* 43) with the dominant ideology that results in 'instances of resistance, protest, and complaint' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 45). The Hysteric's discourse proposes two 'fundamental theses' – one that 'injustice is being done to the subject' and, secondly, that the 'Master is incompetent' (Zupančič, "Surplus" 164). This discourse is 'very much a reaction to the master's discourse' (164) of Tsarist autocracy and it is reasonable to suggest that the expatriate Russian revolutionaries, such as Sophia Antonova, Tekla, Peter Ivanovitch and Madame de S---- to mention but a few, are all examples of subjects constituted within this discourse to a greater or lesser degree. In Peter Ivanovitch, the 'revolutionary feminist' (*Western Eyes* 98), Conrad introduces a character that appears to espouse Zupančič's theses of the Hysteric's discourse. In his first conversation, he states that in Russian 'we have an unclean bureaucracy in the face of a people as great and as incorruptible as the ocean' (89). The ruling powers of the 'unclean bureaucracy' appear commensurate with the 'incompetent' master exercising an 'injustice' upon the innocent, 'incorruptible' people of Russia. Also, the publication of his book which depicts his imprisonment in chains—which is regarded as 'an appalling assertion of the divine right of autocracy' (90)—further pronounces his opposition to the dominant ideology of Russia.

What is also intriguing about Conrad's presentation of Peter Ivanovitch is that he exhibits traits suggestive of a master-like figure whilst he himself is present in the discourse of the Hysteric. This is not contradictory, however. Indeed, 'while Lacan terms one of his discourses the "hysteric's discourse," he does not mean thereby that a given hysteric always and inescapably adopts or functions within the hysteric's discourse' (Fink, *Subject* 129) so that a subject may manifest traits indicative of other discourses whilst primarily located in the Hysteric's discourse. These qualities of a master are reflected in his position of authority within the revolutionary circle as the 'arch-priest of Revolution' (Conrad *Western Eyes* 155). He speaks with a 'great, effortless voice' (95) endowed with 'profound subterranean note' (96) and is labelled a 'heroic fugitive' of 'worldwide celebrity' (94) and even an 'inspired man' (280) by the renowned revolutionist, Sophia Antonova, who proudly styles herself as his 'right hand [...] in most important things' (186). What is more symptomatic of his nascent authority is Ivanovitch's attempted manipulation and control of other subjects. Clearly, he influences Madame de S---- under the auspices of a 'special devotion to [her] transcendental merits' (93) and repeatedly states that she 'will only upset herself' (159) in order to manage her outbursts. This manipulation becomes more striking in the case of Natalia Haldin to whom he demands that 'I want you to be a fanatic' (96) as he 'tower[s] before her, enormous' (95). This attempt to position Natalia's ideological perspective appears at first glance an assertion of control more appropriate to General T---- or Councillor Mikulin. However, it is Natalia's later response to the Teacher of Languages regarding this exchange with the ostensible feminist that reveals a structural position inherent in the discourse of the Hysteric that renders it particularly susceptible to the figure of a master.

When prompted by the Teacher, Natalia explains her rejection of Ivanovitch's overtures. She acknowledges that some 'guide one must have, even if one does not wholly give up the direction of one's conduct to him. I am an inexperienced girl, but I am not slavish' (98). This reference to slavishness elucidates a key propensity of the subject constituted in

the Hysteric's discourse (and one that Natalia herself does not exhibit – indicating she is not to be located in this discourse). That is, despite being 'alienated from the master signifier', the hysterical subject, however, 'remains united' with the 'master's function' (Lacan, *Other Side* 94), so that while the subject rejects the message of the dominant discourse, they still seek a master signifier that will orientate and frame their subjectivity. This search means the subject still retains 'the quest of desire for an object that will satisfy it, the wish of anxiety for security and stability', and therefore exemplifies the 'meaning of Lacan's warning to revolutionary students [or subjects]' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 45). His warning states that 'what [the subjects] aspire to as revolutionaries is a master. [They] will get one' (Lacan, *Other Side* 207).

Therefore, the latent irony of this particular discourse is that despite aiming its rebellion at the present ideology or subject that occupies the structural position of master, the hysterical subject will only end up by substituting this master for another one. Indeed, as Žižek states, the 'hysterical subject needs a Master, cannot do without a Master, so that there is no simple way out' (*Indivisible* 163-4) for them in terms of this need. Conrad's presentation of the revolutionary circle's deference towards Peter Ivanovitch subtly accords with this structural disposition of the Hysteric's discourse to inherently seek a new master and master signifier to order and coordinate their identity. As mentioned, he is designated a 'prophet' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 239) of the revolutionary circle, a feature most visible during the narrator's visit to the Cosmopolitan hotel, where the Teacher notices the 'motionless group with its central figure' and refers to Ivanovitch as the 'great man himself' (240) – a figurehead also revered as the 'great author of the revolutionary gospels' (110). It is uncannily suggestive too that Conrad's first and most effective revolutionary in the novel is indeed a university student, Haldin – just as much as Lacan's own proclamations on the hysterical subject appear exemplified in the university student during his own time of psychoanalytic theorising. Famously, Lacan enjoyed an ambiguous relationship with the



student protests during the Paris riots of 1968. While he does sign their manifesto on 9<sup>th</sup> May, he also criticises their actions in his aforementioned assertion that, above all, they still seek a master (Stavrakakis, *Political* 12).

The hysterical subject will locate themselves in an ideology or system differing to the dominant one but which still offers a similar outcome. They will seek that which offers the 'provision of master signifiers [that] covertly entails or produces a system (S2) of knowledge/belief within which the master signifiers take their bearings and assume their force, and within which the hysterical subject can find their stability' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 45). For the Geneva group, this ideology is simply that of revolution. Ivanovitch is shown to offer a contrary brand of ideology for the Hysterical subject to orientate themselves within when he attempts to position Natalia Haldin. He refers to his circle as 'a unique centre of intellectual freedom and [an] effort to shape a high conception of our future' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 95) – a discourse wherein the subject can be situated in contrast to Russian autocracy but still subordinated to a ruling figure.

While Peter Ivanovitch's machinations reveal one of the endemic structural features of the Hysteric's discourse, it is in Conrad's figuration of his poorly treated servant, Tekla, where one can most clearly discern an exemplification of the subject constituted in the Hysteric's discourse. Of course, her servitude towards Ivanovitch most obviously enacts the structural propensity of the hysterical subject to seek out and subordinate themselves to a master figure. To this end, Tekla contently declares, 'I am quite willing to be the blind instrument of higher ends' and that to 'give one's life for the cause is nothing' (110), as she selflessly writes for Ivanovitch, who she regards as 'the greatest genius of the century perhaps' (108). Her conversation with Natalia Haldin regarding her upbringing immediately reveals subjective constituents reflective of the Hysteric's discourse. Initially, she is positioned close to a socio-symbolic institution constituted within the Master's discourse, as her father is 'a clerk in the Ministry of Finances' (111). Her response to being potentially

embedded in the discourse—that the ‘mere idea of marrying one day such another man as my father made me shudder’ (111)—articulates how she, like Haldin earlier in the narrative, reflects a ‘failure’ to ‘coincide with, or be satisfied with [...] the master signifiers [of autocracy] offered by society’ (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 66). In fact, Tekla identifies autocracy as a ‘crime of the upper classes’ (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 111) and the supporting bureaucratic institutions a ‘grotesque horror’ (111), clearly suggesting a nascent perspective of revolt at that stage of her subjective development. This perspective solidifies when Tekla speaks of a pivotal moment that finally constitutes her in the Hysteric’s discourse, which transpires when she becomes aware of ‘a ragged little girl we had seen begging from men in the streets at dusk’ (111). Her revulsion at this social wrong ensures her ‘eyes began to open gradually to the horrors from which innocent people are made to suffer in this world’ (111). This insight into a disenfranchised social group colours Tekla’s perception so that she concludes it is ‘sin enough to live on a Government salary while half Russia was dying of hunger’ (111). It is clear that she had the opportunity to integrate into the dominant ideology through a potential marriage and her familial background but avoided consolidating her initial symbolic location, reflecting that the hysterical subject is ‘a reaction against interpellation [...] a rejection of the identity imposed on the subject by the predominant form of interpellation’ (Žižek, *Indivisible* 164-165), which in Tekla’s case is Tsarist autocracy.

This rejection of the dominant ideology and subsequent alignment with the marginalised poor is fundamental to the Hysteric’s discourse, which ‘often appears as discourse about injustice, and enthusiastically pleads for the rights of that which remains outside or at the edge of the signifier as symbolic’ (Zupančič, “Surplus” 164). Her ensuing actions consolidate her in the discourse, as she ‘plunge[s]’ (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 111) into a subversive lifestyle, most notably with her helping a ‘journeyman lithographer’ and ‘revolutionist’ (112) who had been beaten by agents of the Tsarist government and left a ‘crushed spirit in that mangled body’ (113). The man’s marginalised situation of ‘lying on a

wooden bedstead without any bedding, with his head on a bundle of dirty rags' in a 'basement' (113), combined with Tekla's vociferous recounting of her care for him, in which she 'had to wait till it was dark before [she] ventured into the streets to beg for a crust of bread' in order to 'keep him and me alive' (114), strongly corresponds to the structure of the Hysteric's discourse. In particular, her actions of helping this man correspond to the proclivity of the Hysterical subject to align themselves with subjects that exist at the margins of the socio-symbolic order.

What also becomes evident in Tekla's dialogue with Natalia Haldin is a more implicit, fundamental trait reflective of the subjective structure of the Hysteric. This trait is one where her rejection of a middle class existence, hatred of the dominant ideology, and her alignment with the forlorn periphery of the socio-symbolic order actually functions as a source of enjoyment for the subject. As Zupančič states, the hysterical subject's most 'notorious feature is the emphasis on renunciation, loss, dissatisfaction, sacrifice' ("Surplus" 167) that function at the core of the discourse. One can detect this emphasis inscribed into Tekla's repetitive assertions of self-abnegation that constantly recur in her speech to allay any unlikely suspicion Natalia may have in considering her a 'sybarite' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 111, 114). Tekla calls her previous situation a 'miracle of wretchedness' (113) and focuses with an almost prurient emphasis on her destitution and lack of clothing, where 'I assure you my clothes were in such a state that it was impossible for me to go out' as she was 'indecent' (114), and later reaffirms again, 'I was not decent' (115). The quality of 'renunciation' is suggested to Natalia when Tekla claims she 'can sleep soundly on bare boards' (114) and that after caring for the lithographer, she was 'nearly dead myself' (115). These traits are also visible in her work as the self-styled '*dame de compagnie*' (114) of Peter Ivanovitch – as she suggests to '[w]ait till you have to sit at a table for half a day with a pen in your hand' (109) when in conversation with Natalia. Additionally, an implicit tone of sacrifice and dissatisfaction pervades her observations of how 'I used to get so stiff and numb that I was

afraid I would lose my balance and fall off the chair' (109) and 'I used to set my teeth till my jaws felt absolutely locked' (110).

These constant allusions to privation appear to confirm that the 'well-known problem of this [subjective] stance is that it fails to see that this renunciation and sacrifice themselves very quickly become a source of surplus enjoyment or satisfaction' (Zupančič, "Surplus" 167). While perhaps already implicit in the prurient references to her 'sacrificial' lack of clothing, one further moment which most strongly hints at this enjoyment is when Tekla again criticises the Russian ministries. Conrad stresses that '[h]atred and contempt hisse[s] in her utterance of the word "'finances'"' (*Western Eyes* 112), while curiously drawing attention to the simultaneous action in that 'very moment' in which 'she gently stroke[s] the cat reposing in her arms' and 'rub[s] her cheek against the fur of the animal' (112). This sensual, almost intimate 'caress' (112) suggests a form of unconscious enjoyment, predicated upon her rejection of and revolt towards the dominant symbolic institutions and the destitution she endures due to her sacrifices.

Conrad's figuration of Tekla in her later conversation with Razumov compounds this position. That the 'hysteric is satisfied with nothing, in both possible meanings of this expression' (Zupančič, "Surplus" 167) is perhaps revealed in the one sense as their enjoyment of sacrifice and renunciation as examined above. It is also manifest, however, in the 'well-known motto of hysterics when it comes to matters of satisfaction', which is '[t]hat's not it!' (167). No one scenario or object satisfies them in the discourse. Tekla's initial description of Ivanovitch implies this idea – she refers to him both as the aforementioned 'genius' but also the 'most inconsiderate man living' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 108) and later designates him an 'awful despot' (171) to Razumov when she first encounters the student at the Chateau Borel. Indeed, the hysteric's lack of satisfaction is evidenced when Tekla admits to Razumov she is 'disillusioned' (171) with working for Ivanovitch. Importantly, she is then shown by Conrad to immediately seek a new master in the form of Razumov, enacting the structure of the

Hysteric's discourse while also reflecting the dissatisfaction inherent in it. She suggests to the student that 'you have only to let me know. I will come to you. I will indeed. And I will stick to you' (172) and also offers to sacrifice herself in 'dangerous work' (172) if needed. Tellingly, at Razumov's mention that he himself may already be 'engaged in dangerous work' (172), Tekla displays the same physical symptoms of unacknowledged *jouissance* as in her earlier conversation with Natalia Haldin. Conrad describes her as suddenly 'press[ing] the cat to her threadbare bosom with a breathless exclamation' (172) at hearing Razumov's statement. Conrad's alliterative references to 'bosom' and a 'breathless exclamation' again connotes an almost prurient sense of a repressed, sexualised enjoyment in the potential acts of self-abnegation to be endured—or enjoyed—when rebelling against the dominant ideology of Tsarism in the socio-symbolic order.

In her proposal of service to Razumov, Tekla predictably states she could 'watch for hours at the corner of a street if necessary, -in wet or snow' (174), again demonstrating her desire to perform punishing acts of sacrifice. Interestingly, however, Tekla also offers to perform a series of actions that reflect another aspect of the hysterical subject. The hysterical subject 'wants the other to be a master, and to know lots of things' but at the same time [the subject] doesn't want him to know so much that he does not believe [the hysteric] is the supreme prize of all his knowledge' (Lacan, *Other Side* 129). This subject wants to position themselves as the fulcrum of their master's knowledge—to be seen as indispensable—and Conrad's presentation of Tekla fully accords with this structure. In conversation with Razumov, she explicitly desires to 'write for you dangerous documents, lists of names or instructions, so that in case of mischance the handwriting could not compromise you' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 174) which articulates this drive to be central to her master's production and organisation of knowledge. Of course, this is exactly what she previously did for Ivanovitch in her duties as his scribe. Tekla works tirelessly 'behind the scenes', where she would sit 'perfectly motionless' and copy his dictation for 'hours and hours' (109) –

performing a vital function in the transcription of the master's knowledge. It is perhaps Razumov's trenchant observation that this 'revolutionist [is] not fit for an independent existence' (174) that most amply sums up the structural necessity of the subject constituted within the Hysteric's discourse to seek out a master to serve.

That the subject constituted in the Master's discourse or University discourse and the subject of the Hysteric's discourse are all subordinated to a master, albeit in differing, less explicit ways, is not the only similarity that can be evinced across these discourses. Another subjective operation that is present across both the Master's discourse and the Hysteric's discourse can be discerned. It is first evident in Razumov's dream, following his interpellation into the dominant ideology of Tsarism, which saw him conceptualise Russia in the form of a map. This appeared suggestive of Lacan's subject of science. As discussed in my chapter on *The Secret Agent*, this subject could ostensibly position themselves as occupying a location enabling a perception of a field of knowledge in its entirety – of a world 'over there', easily viewed or grasped as a whole. Of course, this capacity was shown to be violently undermined in Conrad's depiction of socio-symbolic reality in the novel.

It is telling, however, that Conrad then appears to show the revolutionists themselves as exhibiting aspects of this same subjective structure in their plotting to depose the Tsarist regime. In this episode, Conrad situates the major revolutionary figures together in the Hotel Cosmopolitan, avidly scrutinising 'a map of the Baltic provinces' (*Western Eyes* 241) with a noticeable, repeated emphasis upon this object. Crucially, it is distinguished as 'the only brilliantly lit object in the room' (241), and a 'big-scale map' (242), which also functions as a backdrop for the figure of Ivanovitch as 'behind him the vivid patch of light on the coloured map' (242) is shown to dominate the room. As the Teacher of Languages passes his gaze across the group of revolutionaries who are all illuminated in a 'mysterious half-light' (242), the visual focus of this panorama is then firmly reorientated back onto the 'strongly lighted map of Russia on the table' (242), almost as if it functions as the stabilising,

foundational axis of Conrad's construction of this scene – a kind of textual vanishing point. If this rationalised, geometric emblem of circumscribed, quantifiable space is indeed a substratum undergirding this group's perceptual or egoic activities—a rationalised object exterior to them but that simultaneously organises their consciousness—then it suggests a deeper, more fundamental co-extensiveness between the structure of the revolutionary subject and the autocratic subject. Both are examples of the Lacanian subject of science qua *cogito* – the subject dependent upon a rationalised conception of reality. If there is a fundamental subjective architecture that can be traced across the outlines of both of these subjects entrenched in opposing discourses, then it must fall to the last Lacanian discourse to offer the potential space to enact a subjective transformation – the discourse of the Analyst.

#### **Razumov, Natalia Haldin and the Analyst's discourse**

In a moment narrated later in part four of the novel, but which occurs chronologically earlier than the Geneva sequence, Conrad presents an exchange that suggests how the conscious identity requires a corresponding discourse to help secure its coherency. Councillor Mikulin remarks to Razumov at the end of their first interview, that '[y]ou are going away free as air, but you shall end by coming back to us', and how some of 'our greatest minds had to do that in the end' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 218). Razumov's acknowledgement that Mikulin was 'perhaps, the only man in the world able to understand his conduct' (219) is borne out when he receives the councillor's summons, as he goes 'with a certain eagerness' (224) to converse with the bureaucrat. From a Lacanian perspective, this action suggests the extent to which Razumov's ego benefits from existing in those 'circuits of discourse' which reinforce the master signifiers of the ideology of autocracy into which he has been interpellated and also how he is also positioned as a subordinate within the Master's discourse.

It is from this subjective position that Conrad then removes him and relocates him against an oppositional discourse—that of the Hysteric—in the Geneva sections of the novel. Of course, while Razumov is masquerading as a revolutionist in the city, his conscious identity is still constituted in the ideology of autocracy. Conrad's figuration of his thoughts supports this contention, as he regards the home of Ivanovitch—the Chateau Borel—as a 'house of folly, of blindness, of villainy and crime' (183) and later, while in conversation with Sophia Antonova, considers one of the dissidents as an 'imbecile victim of revolutionary propaganda, some foolish slave of foreign, subversive ideals' (190) and feels a 'strong repugnance' (186) when merely pronouncing her name. However, given that Razumov is situated among subjects of a discourse that is antithetical to his own ideology, his ego is therefore deprived of the symbolic networks which had helped to sustain its coherency. Further, he is now intimately embedded into a discourse that is aligned with the repressed object of his own unconscious identification, Victor Haldin. As such, it is predictable that his ego would be placed under immense psychic pressure in an incommensurate symbolic position. This is not an untypical occurrence. There are often such 'conflicts among different interpellations, and consequently, among the respective subject positions to which they lead [which] can interpellate a given subject or subjects into contradictory positions' (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 47). Two possibilities arise at this point, 'either the ego ideal can prevail, in which case the fantasy is suppressed, repressed, or altered (e.g. sublimated), or the fantasy can win out, in which case the ego ideal undergoes a change' (47) and the subject will discard its old master signifiers and reorientate its subjectivity. That Razumov is shown to struggle with this conflict and repression of Haldin is evident while he is still in Russia. His ego is tortured with 'Haldin, always Haldin-nothing but Haldin-everywhere Haldin' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 220) in a continual return of the real, but the student is shown at this juncture to regain control, and have 'the upper hand, in a composed sense of his own superiority' (221). In his lodgings he



feels 'safe from Haldin' – a temporary sense of security that is eviscerated when he journeys to Geneva.

It is in Geneva that Conrad inscribes Razumov's conscious identity with a vitiated, emasculated quality which appears to hint at the increasing fragility of his ego and the intensifying violence of the return of his repressed object, and it is unsurprising that this process is enacted during his meeting with Natalia Haldin. Razumov is now plagued by these thoughts. Every 'word uttered by Haldin live[s] in Razumov's memory' and they are likened to 'haunting shapes' (123), as the repressed object continually intrudes upon his consciousness. His unconscious identification is most visibly touched upon as he meets Natalia and she 'gasp[s] out' (127) her brother's name. Razumov's response to hearing this name is notable, as Natalia later reports to the Teacher how the translator 'should have seen his face. He positively reeled' (127). This reaction perhaps confirms the object of Razumov's repression is identification with Haldin, as it is hearing this signifier that elicits this particular example of parapraxis. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the act of repression reveals how a 'signifier is elided from the signifying chain' and consequently 'always involves "the return of the repressed"', whereby the repressed signifier reappears under the guise of the various formations of the unconscious' (Evans 168). As mentioned, in Russia, Razumov is plagued by the return of this very signifier—'nothing but Haldin-everywhere Haldin' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 220)—and the 'phantom' (221) of the revolutionary, one of the 'various formations of the unconscious', ceaselessly haunts him. Again, when the Teacher invokes Razumov's supposed friendship with his 'late comrade and intimate fellow-revolutionist' (139), the Englishman is 'astounded' to observe the 'convulsive start of his whole body', after which the student 'restrain[s] himself' and 'fold[s] his loosened arms tighter across his chest' (139) in an action suggestive of a conscious assertion of his self-identity.

One particularly striking aspect of Conrad's description of Razumov in this sequence accords with the apparent paucity and fragility of his ego, and how his consciousness

articulates only one partial, incomplete aspect of his subjectivity. This is imaged into the text via Conrad's references to Razumov's speech to the Teacher about the events with Haldin, where the student's voice is delineated in terms markedly different to his locution in Russia. The Teacher notes how he speaks with a 'faint, rasping voice quite like a man with a parched throat' (133) and moments later observes him talking with 'that wavering, hoarse voice which suggest[s] a horribly dry throat' (134). In fact, this specific description recurs over the following pages to the extent where his voice seems 'practically extinct, dried up in his throat' and his throat itself 'had no more resonance than a dry rag, a piece of tinder' (136). A representation of speech as 'extinct', 'faint' and a 'dry rag' can be seen from a Lacanian perspective as indicative of 'empty speech'. Empty speech is where 'the subject is alienated from his desire' (Evans 194), in the sense that the subject 'speak[s] in vain' and cannot achieve an 'assumption of his desire' (Lacan, *Écrits* 211). For Lacan, the mode of empty speech 'articulates the imaginary dimension of language, the speech from the ego to the counterpart' (Evans 194) and therefore precludes the dimension of the unconscious.

The literal drying up of Razumov's egoic speech appears to reflect the diminishing substance of his ego – one separated from its commensurate symbolic network of autocracy and subjected to the increasing prominence of his unconscious identification. Indeed, the Geneva section of the novel is littered with the tics and spasms of the student. Along with the aforementioned parapraxis with Natalia, he is also shown to 'totter [...] a little' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 135) when conversing with the Teacher and 'shrug[s] his shoulders so violently that he totter[s] again' (136). His walking is labelled 'unsteady' and he exhibits a 'twitching of his lips before he sp[eeks]' (141). When he later passes the 'very spot' of his first meeting with Natalia, Razumov 'falter[s]' as if 'affected physically by some invisible interference' (150) suggesting both the identification with Haldin and the nascent affect Natalia is exerting upon his subjectivity. The schism between his ego and unconscious seems to be enacted by Conrad as following the student's meeting with Ivanovitch, he feels dissociated from his own being,

‘as though another self, an independent sharer of his mind, had been able to view his whole person very distinctly indeed’ (169). After one question from Antonova, he loses his ‘presence of mind’ and can ‘make only a sort of gurgling, grumpy sound’ (187). Indeed, the sense of Razumov’s ego fragmenting suggested through this imagery of corporeal imbalance is heightened by its contrast to the egoic certitude of Antonova herself, who is depicted as an ‘upright compact figure’ with a ‘simple, brisk self-possession’ (194). It is only when Razumov has the opportunity to write in his secret diary—a document designed to sustain his own self-image as an agent of Tsarism—that Razumov ‘regain[s] a certain measure of self-composure’ (249).

Therefore, with his ego undermined by the return of the repressed and deprived of its network of discourse, the schism in Razumov’s subjectivity has intensified to the degree where he becomes susceptible to an alternative subject position. This is the last of Lacan’s four discourses – the discourse of the Analyst. This discourse offers the potential to resolve the schism of the subject, which is the ‘internal conflict between, on one hand, the identity (the S1) the [subject] has assumed and tries to maintain, and, on the other hand, an unconscious desire for a jouissance (the *a*) that is excentric to or incommensurable with (i.e., forbidden by) this assumed identity’ (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 68-69). Here, the ‘identity’ Razumov has ‘assumed’ is that of an agent and follower of the ideology of autocratic Tsarism following his earlier interpellation, and the ‘conflict’ is clearly in his identification and sympathy with Haldin the revolutionary – most obviously a position that is ‘excentric to or incommensurable with’ his ‘assumed identity’. The Analyst’s function is to enable the subject to ‘separate from the given master signifiers’ (68). It is only at this point that ‘there can emerge another style of master signifier’ (Lacan, *Other Side* 176), and the Analyst’s discourse is the only discourse with the potential to enact this change.

The figure in the narrative who appears to engender this function is that of Natalia Haldin. Of course, this is not to say that Conrad presents Natalia as an analyst. It is rather a

case of appreciating how Conrad's depiction of Natalia allows her to be located in the discourse of the Analyst. This location is possible because of the transformative effects she enables in Razumov's subjectivity and the structural position she occupies in his subjective economy, as will be presently examined. Further, it is compelling to note the progression in Conrad's depiction of female subjectivity in contrast to, for example, that of Nina Almayer as analysed in chapter one. Indeed, Natalia is presented as an 'autonomous figure' that 'needs no one to save her' (Kaplan, "Beyond Gender" 272). She 'refuses marriage, chooses a career', and, ultimately, 'forges her own destiny' (272) – a character who can 'function in both personal and political worlds' (Peters 175), moving between the locales of Peter Ivanovitch, the revolutionaries and her mother with assurance and confidence. This path is in diametrical opposition to that of Nina's in *Almayer's Folly*, or, indeed, Jewel in *Lord Jim*; characters that are portrayed in states of 'ontological arrest' (Soane 53) – and, finally, 'subsumed' (50) within patriarchal structures.

Equally important from a Lacanian perspective, is that this indisputable sense of subjective autonomy that defines Natalia converges with her character enacting the liberating function of the Analyst's discourse. It is in the Analyst's discourse that one can locate an autonomous dimension to his model of the female subject – one that goes beyond Elizabeth Grosz's assertion that Lacan's female is fully determined by the male subject and the phallus. Indeed, as Žižek notes, in the 'matrix of the four discourses', the Analyst's position is, crucially, a 'feminine' ("Four Discourses" 107) structure, so that the 'being of pure drive' that 'emerges' in the 'shift from desire to drive' is a 'feminine figure' (108 italics in original). It is here that Conrad offers a depiction of a female character that encodes a confluence of multiple Lacanian elements, and enables an appreciation of Lacan's model of female subjectivity that is in excess of the varying conceptual strands that the psychoanalyst offers across several of his various seminars.

It is worth noting how Natalia accords with the discourse of the Analyst even prior to her meeting with Razumov. Natalia rejects subservience to both Ivanovitch in the revolutionary circle of the Hysteric's discourse and the ideology of autocracy in the Master's discourse, which echoes Lacan's observation that the Analyst's discourse 'has to be located at the opposite of any wish [...] for mastery' (*Other Side* 79). Conrad also presents her as exhibiting a quality in her speech that eludes a fixed and controllable meaning. The Teacher remarks how the 'most precise of her sayings seem[s] always to me to have enigmatical prolongations vanishing somewhere beyond my reach' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 88) which is suggestive of the analyst's speech. The 'very condition of analytic discourse' involves a 'displacement that never ceases' (Lacan, *Other Side* 147) which reflects 'a continuous flight from meaning and closure' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 46). This figuration strongly suggests the analyst's knowledge, which is a knowledge 'very different from that found in the discourses of the University or the Master' (Bracher, "Lacan's Theory" 47), as Lacan categorises it as a 'mythical knowledge' (*Other Side* 91). One can sense this 'mythical knowledge' in her conversation with the Teacher as they leave the Hotel Cosmopolitan. Natalia appears to propose a course that transcends both autocracy, but crucially, also revolution. She remarks to Ivanovitch that she 'hope[s] to see the time when all this w[ill] be forgotten, even if the name of my brother [is] to be forgotten too' and thinks of the 'era of concord and justice' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 243). She is shown to recognise 'too much hate and revenge' in their work and to '[l]et the tyrants and the slayers be forgotten together, and only the reconstructors be remembered' (243) in a cryptic proposal that disaffirms both of the dominant discourses at work in the text.

Regardless of these initial parallels, it is the subjective effects rendered upon Razumov that most keenly echo the structural position of the Analyst's discourse. Many of these effects are discernible via the mechanism of 'transference' which is a 'special term to

denote the patient's relationship to the analyst [and] is justified by the peculiar character of this relationship' (Evans 213). An initial benefit of this relationship is that it is 'a way for the analysand's history to be confronted in the immediacy of the present relationship with the analyst; in the way he [or her] relates to the analyst, the analysand inevitably repeats earlier relationships with other figures' (Evans 213). Conrad's depiction of Razumov's initial feelings towards Natalia can be seen to repeat his earlier dealings with her brother, Victor. In the same way Razumov hated and finally betrayed her brother, so too does Razumov admit to Natalia that 'I believed that I had in my breast nothing but an inexhaustible fund of anger and hate for you' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 262). A further repetition appears when the student considers Haldin as having 'stolen the truth of my life', which Razumov then seeks to repeat through an act of 'theft' in which he would 'steal his sister's soul from her' (263).

This process of repetition is only one aspect of the transference. More crucially, the analysand must perceive the analyst figure as the 'subject [...] supposed to know' (Lacan, *Four Concepts* 232). The 'subject supposed to know' does not 'designate the analyst himself, but a function which the analyst may come to embody in the treatment' (Evans 199). This analyst is 'supposed to know that from which no one can escape, [...] quite simply, signification [or the] dimension of [the subject's] desire' (Lacan, *Four Concepts* 253), which is the 'secret meaning of the analysand's words' (Evans 199). Essentially, the subject sees the analyst as embodying or holding a unique form of knowledge that will help the subject overcome their difficulties. It is interesting that Razumov appropriately refers to Natalia as 'truth itself' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 264)—as if she contains an unerring knowledge—and remarks that it is 'as if your pure brow b[ears] a light which f[alls] on me, search[ing] my heart' (264). This simile implies a 'supposed' penetrative or insightful capacity of Natalia's that is imbricated into Razumov's perception of her. This insight or knowledge is reinforced when he goes on to state 'there [is] that in your glances which seem[s] to tell me that you...Your light! Your truth!' (264-65). He again supposes a 'knowledge' on her part, in an exclamation that interestingly breaks down

into an ellipsis just at the point where the student would have had to explicitly state what that knowledge is. It is tempting to see this ellipsis as representative of an inexpressible, 'secret' knowledge available only to the analyst and elided into the sentence's conclusion of 'light' and 'truth'.

If Razumov's utterances here are suggestive of love, this is commensurate to a Lacanian reading, as the appearance of love is fundamental to what Lacan terms the 'transference effect', which is the 'effect of love' (*Four Concepts* 253). Lacan 'identifie[s] the analysand with the lover, the analyst with the beloved, and the resulting strategies of transference with the dynamics of love' (Nobus, *Jacques Lacan* 127). The lover 'none the less believes that the loved object possesses the means to neutralize [his lack], thus restoring a sense of completeness' (127). That Razumov believes Natalia alone has the capacity to restore him is evident as he designates her the one 'alone in all the world to whom I must confess. You fascinated me-you have freed me from the blindness of anger and hate-the truth shining in you drew the truth out of me' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 265). The manner in which Razumov views Natalia also appears in a Lacanian sense to suggest that she embodies the '*agalma*'. This concept refers to a 'plain box which encloses a precious object (Grk *agalma*) [and] just as Alcibiades attributes a hidden treasure to Socrates, so the analysand sees his object of desire in the analyst' (Evans 214). Razumov's attraction to Natalia is figured in terms similar to this as he 'has the air of a man who is listening to a strain of music rather than to articulated speech' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 255). It is a combination of these elements that enables the subject to obviate their master signifiers and integrate the repressed part of their being.

What this discourse must elucidate for the subject is 'precisely what has been excluded from symbolization [and] suppressed by the discourse of the Master' (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 68). What is then achieved is that the discourse of the Analyst 'interpellates the analysand to recognise, acknowledge, and deal with the excluded portion of being' (68).

Conrad's depiction of Razumov's encounter with Natalia strongly appears to resonate with this process. Razumov is portrayed as 'though he were coming to himself in the awakened consciousness of that marvellous harmony of feature, of lines, of glances, of voice' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 251) – that it is through a heightened awareness of Natalia that he can achieve this psychic resolution. The phrase 'he were coming to himself' almost appears to enact the assimilation of a dissociated aspect of his own subjectivity through the two pronouns of 'he' and 'himself' – Razumov can 'identify with this excluded part of his or her being, the *a'*' (Bracher, *Lacan Discourse* 69). He later acknowledges in his diary, that in that moment he realises in 'giving Victor Haldin up, it was myself, after all, whom I betrayed most basely' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 265). As a subject, he is now aware of and has integrated the part of himself that was dissociated via his earlier interpellation into autocracy. That Razumov appears free of this master signifier can be detected in his following statement ending his diary – that he is now 'independent' (265).

It is this sequence of psychic resolution that has started 'opening Razumov to true speech at last' (Paccaud, "Under Other's Eyes" 61). Following his exchange with Natalia, the 'self-addressed diary becomes a locus for true interlocution' (61) as Razumov can express the truth of his previous self-division. What is interesting about Paccaud's observation is that it appears Razumov can now enact 'full speech', which is the opposite of his earlier egoic, 'empty speech'. Lacan calls full speech 'a speech full of meaning' (Lacan, qtd. in Evans 194), and also refers to it as 'true speech' – a speech that 'aims at, which forms, the truth' (Lacan, *Freud's Techniques* 107) of the subject's desire. Once he formulates this 'truth', the subject is transformed, and 'finds himself, afterwards, other than he was before' (107), reflecting the liberating potential of the Analyst's discourse. With Razumov's newfound awareness of his feelings of betrayal about Haldin, he can now articulate a level of his own subjectivity that was previously denied to him. Indeed, his subsequent confession to the revolutionary circle at Laspara's home is made while 'mastering his voice so far' it had a 'clear, forcible



enunciation' (Conrad, *Western Eyes* 268), in stark contrast to his earlier, 'practically extinct', 'dry rag' (136) of a voice. It is highly suggestive that, after Razumov has reconciled his divided self and appears to speak from a point of integrated subjectivity, Conrad subjects the student to the horrific violence of Necator's deafening of him as well as his maiming via the tram accident.

A parallel can be drawn here to Jim's fate in *Patusan* as well as the young sailor's act in transgressing the bounds of the symbolic community in which he was constituted. While I would not explicitly label Razumov's action an actual Lacanian ethical act—due to him not experiencing an *aphanisis* or an accompanying trauma in precisely the same terms as Caruth's model—there are parallels to be drawn, and, certainly, the deafening of Razumov offers some similarities to a traumatic experience. Razumov in his confession does step outside the symbolic parameters of his previous intersubjective community—autocratic Tsarism—by exposing his identity to the assembled expatriates, in a manner which echoes Jim's leap from the *Patna* and rejection of the merchant navy. Perhaps the most important parallel that can be drawn across the two novels is when Antonova reveals that the former student is crippled and under the care of Tekla (who has found her new master). She remarks that he is 'ill' and 'getting weaker every day' but, more significantly, 'has ideas...He talks well, too' (278). This notion, that he 'commands speech' (Paccaud, "Under Other's Eyes" 67) in his disabled state, can be seen in a Lacanian context as reflecting his accession to the level of drive – the same drive Jim is shown to have accessed in *Patusan*.

What is key here is that despite Razumov having resolved the split in his subjectivity and acceded to 'full speech', this state of freeing oneself from previous symbolic confines is clearly shown by Conrad to be highly precarious. Just as much as Jim's existence in the 'linguistic utopia' (Greany 152) of *Patusan* is temporary and quickly disrupted by Gentleman Brown, so too is Razumov's command of 'full speech' soon to be curtailed by his impending death. The possibility of Razumov maintaining his new subject position is inherently

undermined. This appears to reflect Lacan's assertion that to access the drive of the subject also irrevocably entails an equally potential access to the death drive unless the steps to sustain this form of subjectivity can be enacted. Indeed, while Conrad's novel suggestively prefigures the fundamental structure of Lacan's four discourses, it also appears to assert that accessing and maintaining a form of subjectivity that offers a level of satisfaction is fraught with challenges.



## Conclusion: Lacanian Identification of the Conradian Subject

In the present literary critical climate—both in regards to Conrad and more broadly—theory and subjectivity have inarguably been marginalised. At its most basic level, this thesis has sought to vindicate the claim that Conrad's novels prefigure elements of Lacan's work. Indeed, the suggestion that an affinity exists between the two figures has often been made. For example, Terry Collits comments that Conrad's texts 'appear to anticipate certain aspects of [...] Lacanian psychoanalysis' (134). However, observations such as this one have not been substantiated or developed in a sustained manner. My thesis offers a systematic, methodical reading of Conrad's fiction through Lacan's theory. Accordingly, given the range of Conrad's fiction employed in this study, both earlier and later—alongside the breadth of Lacanian theory that has been drawn into dialogue with it—a much more comprehensive relationship between the two writers is evident. Conrad's work clearly harbours not only the fundamental constituents of the Lacanian model of subjectivity, but, further, the more recondite aspects of Lacan's increasingly complex modes of the subject. His fiction offers them not as a piecemeal assemblage of disparate psychoanalytic components laboriously reconstructed into a haphazard and brittle edifice, but, rather, as an intricate and lucid series of subjective concepts clearly articulated through a coherent artistic vision.

Taking this interpretation still further, it becomes imperative to also appreciate the extent to which Lacan's theoretical model is enhanced and enriched by Conrad's own writing. Perhaps the most fundamental of these developments is the *political* dimension that Conrad brings to bear on his presentation of subjectivity. Conrad presents Lacan's subject as operating in varying political systems with a geographical reach well beyond what is offered in Lacan's own writing. More specifically, Lacan's psychoanalytic theorising, and, indeed, praxis as a clinician, is based in Paris, France, with a socially privileged, ethnically homogenous clientele. A sense of cultural narrowness can be attributed to Lacan, which is

perhaps only remedied by the expansiveness of Conrad's artistic vision. Certainly, in contrast to Lacan, Conrad transposes this essentially limited clinical and theoretical model into a much broader geographical, global, and, more importantly, ideological dimension – one that includes multiple locations as well as multiple points in time.

For example, the subject of desire is not geographically or culturally fixed to a specific location or only existent in one socio-symbolic system. One such subject, the Dutch Kaspar Almayer, is depicted in an isolated, colonial context in Malaysia and embedded within a community that incorporates Arab traders, local Malay villagers as well as itinerant French naval personnel, and, yet, Conrad's vision illustrates how the subject of desire can be constituted within and impacted by these various political and cultural forces – even to the point of psychoanalytic collapse. Indeed, Jim's initial subjectivity, while being founded in the setting of provincial England, is then explored not only in varying physical locations but Conrad further uses him to reveal how the subject is relentlessly processed according to the brutal dictates of imperial capital across Asia and the Far East. He reveals how the subject's own desire is modulated and underpinned by the requirements of the commercial systems founded upon the ebbs and flows of capital itself. Therefore, Conrad shows us a much more nuanced depiction of the relationship between the subject and the workings of capitalism than Lacan's theory actually accounts for in his model.

After the transition into the subject of drive, Jim is enmeshed in the community of Patusan with its indigenous community and unique power structure, much in the same way that Natalia Haldin exists in the expatriate Russian community of Switzerland, so that Conrad illustrates that the subject of drive can exist within both a western democratic system as well as an indigenous society. In terms of broadening a political comprehension of Lacan's work, perhaps Conrad's presentation of Lacan's master signifiers and the four discourses is the most compelling. Through the Teacher of Languages, and the parallel presentation of Razumov, the operation of interpellation and master signifiers binding and organising an

ideological field is demonstrated to work nearly identically across both the systems of Russian autocratic tsarism as well as western liberal democracy. What this might offer for Conrad studies is the potential opening up of materialist-orientated studies that seek to understand the author's work only in term of his own political experiences and belief. Instead, research into Conrad's writing could now entail a much more multi-faceted mode of analysis, which integrates a consideration of the subjective operations and structures that underpin these political beliefs.

Conrad's novels demonstrate the marked shifts in social reality and subjectivity that occur during his period, and the extent to which these changes still resonate outwards much later on into the twentieth century and beyond. It is the formalisation evidenced in Lacan's psychoanalytic model that is required to articulate Conrad's artistic insights into subjective change, and Lacan's theory is consummately attuned to the subtleties and resonances of the subject's condition encoded into the author's work – theory which is in turn transformed by Conrad's depiction of the subject. Conrad's characters—Almayer, Nina, Jim, Verloc, and Razumov—all register to varying degrees the experiences of the subject as it is shaped by and reacts to the increasing impact of transnational capital. It is the delicately calibrated lens of Lacanian theory that best detects these movements, as well as those brief glimpses where Conrad's subject temporarily breaches the symbolic confines of imperial capitalism and overcomes its determining imperatives. Lacanian theory is certainly the most insightful—indeed perhaps the only—means of discovering these exact qualities within Conrad's work. In addition, such an interpretation helps to renew, in a more local sense, the efficacy of theoretical analysis and deep reading in Conrad studies, and to offer additional proof that theory—informed by historical context but not circumscribed by it—can continue to reveal hitherto unseen dimensions of the author's fiction, while avoiding the grindingly empirical method of a reductive historicist approach.

Tony Jackson draws attention to an integral connection between the genres of the modernist novel and the writings of psychoanalysis. He observes that it is 'more than a coincidence that the novel becomes its own genre in the same era as Descartes' (Jackson 16), suggesting that the self-present cogito perhaps mirrors the secure protagonist of the realist novel. This relationship functions in a similar way later, as it is more than just a 'coincidence that [the] narrative form [of the modernist novel] changes so significantly just when psychoanalysis formulates a new idea of subjectivity' (16). Psychoanalysis, and, especially Lacanian psychoanalysis, accepts and probes the 'ontological uncertainty' (26) of the Cartesian subject which parallels the manner in which the modernist novel seeks to represent and question the previously assumed infallibility of human consciousness.

This study also assists in correcting the critical trend in which poststructuralism has become a 'toolbox of reading strategies to be drawn upon whenever a deconstructive hammer or a Lacanian screwdriver seems handy' (Friedman 238) – a disconnected and decontextualized methodology that undermines the relevance and effectiveness of theory. These 'fragmentary uses' actually 'reduc[e] a coherent body of theory into partial and selective strategies that can wrench the components out of their larger frameworks, displacing them into other, possibly incompatible frameworks' (238).

Instead, a Lacanian interpretation should hopefully support the opposite outcome – that a sustained theoretical analysis is not only worthwhile but, in fact, potentially revelatory and highly effective, and that its uses extend well beyond application to the work of Conrad alone and onto other modernist writers. On a wider critical level, a Lacanian methodology is one tool that might help expose and remedy the intellectual myopia induced by literary critical approaches that blandly and supinely accommodate the dominant ideological status-quo and reinforce the rigidity of a subjective structure that is subordinated to it. During a period of the increasing encroachment of the logic of finance and capital into many university

English departments, surely more theoretical thinking is required to maintain a vigilant awareness of this tendency, rather than literary critical approaches that appear to disavow or elide these ideological realities and attempt to view a text as divorced from broader political concerns.

Having demonstrated the effectiveness of Lacanian literary interpretation, I suggest that there are other potential areas of research within modernist studies that would benefit from a sustained Lacanian reading. Considering the depth of the conceptual relationship between Conrad and Lacan, it would be beneficial to explore the extent to which other modernist authors prefigure other aspects of Lacanian thought. The novels of Virginia Woolf, with their exploration and depiction of the subject, offer a fertile, potential area for further investigation, as might the works of Djuna Barnes – the latter especially in regards to Lacan's ideas around perversion.

Conrad's earliest fiction explores the human subject, and it is an intrinsic concern that threads throughout his writing career. If it is true, as he suggests to Edward Garnett in 1896, that the conscious mind is simply a 'masquerade' of 'something hopelessly unknown', Conrad also enables both critic and reader the greatest opportunity to locate and glimpse these unknown regions. His work presciently articulates the very fabric of subjectivity that still animates us today.





## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This position is unquestionably one which senior members of *The Conradian* are sympathetic towards in their critical perspective. Hugh Epstein remarked during a very pleasant afternoon tea in 2015 that theory's time had unambiguously passed, and, while present scholarship would be "informed" by theory, Conrad studies would be predominantly archival in nature.

<sup>2</sup> There are multiple critical attempts to move away from the dominance of historicism at the present time. While Rita Felski's criticism is one specific example, Caroline Levine's new formalism is another such attempt.

<sup>3</sup> While I am aware of and support the political debate around pronoun usage and non-binary genders, in the interests of readability I have chosen to use the pronouns "his" and "her" in regards to the subject. The choice of "their" was considered and decided against due to the need to maintain grammatical accuracy. Further, while I am not endorsing or legitimising Lacan's model of subjectivity, the use of "his" and "her" is probably more reflective of the binary structure with which it operates.

<sup>4</sup> This perspective is shared by other critics. See Tonya Krouse's *The Opposite of Desire: Sex and Pleasure in the Modernist Novel* and Joseph Allen Boone's *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism* as two such examples.

<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to observe that this structure appears to be in Conrad's writing which mirrors Lacan's. The idea that the Name of the Father guarantees the whole symbolic order against the real is modified in later Lacan. Lacan realises that the paternal function is localised for each individual subject—the Name of the Father works on an individual level—and that the real inherently "studs" the wider symbolic order so that there cannot be an ultimate, external guarantor; the Name of the Father cannot secure the outer boundaries of the symbolic. Similarly, Conrad's depiction of socio-symbolic reality follows this progression. At this early stage in Conrad's writing, the writer appears to instil in the figures that enact the Name of the Father in *Almayer's Folly* this broader function of maintaining the whole socio-symbolic order of western capitalism. However, later, most notably in *The Secret Agent*, the symbolic order itself is shown to be exposed to the real.

<sup>6</sup> Tamás Juhász offers a revealing investigation of this concept of exchange in regards to Nina through primarily economic terms in his work, *Conradian Contracts: Exchange and Identity in the Immigrant Imagination*.

<sup>7</sup> See Donald R. Benson's article, "Constructing an Ethereal Cosmos: Late Classical Physics and *Lord Jim*" for a detailed exploration of the role of physics in the novel.

<sup>8</sup> This connection between the man-made coordinate of the prime meridian and capitalism will be duly explored in my chapter on *The Secret Agent*.

<sup>9</sup> The scientific fields of entropy and thermodynamics have also been explored in recent years. See Michael Whitworth's "Inspector Heat Inspected: The Secret Agent and the Meaning of Entropy", Allen Macduffie's "Joseph Conrad's Geographies of Energy" and Alex Houen's "'The Secret Agent': Anarchism and the Thermodynamics of Law" for a fuller discussion of this area.

<sup>10</sup> Josiane Paccaud's article, "The-Name-of-the-Father in Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*", offers an insightful exploration into the role that the paternal function plays in Razumov's subjectivity, particularly in regards to the figure of Prince K----. The role of the Name of the Father is also explored in Tamás Juhász's chapter on the novel.

<sup>11</sup> Catherine Rising suggests that Mikulin, during this conversation with Razumov, enacts the Analytic discourse which helps free Razumov from the discourse of the Master or University. In fact, the inverse appears true—it only consolidates him in these discourses—as following the dialogue Razumov pursues the mission given to him by Mikulin. An Analytic discourse occurs much later in the text.

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